

OXFORD–WARBURG STUDIES

GENERAL EDITORS  
CHARLES HOPE AND IAN MACLEAN

THE EXPERIENCE  
OF BEAUTY  
IN THE  
MIDDLE AGES

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MARY CARRUTHERS

OXFORD

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*General Editors*

CHARLES HOPE *and* IAN MACLEAN



Oxford-Warburg Studies comprise works of original research on the intellectual and cultural history of Europe, with particular reference to the transmission and reception of ideas and images originating in the ancient world. The emphasis of the series is on elite rather than popular culture, and the underlying aim is to foster an interdisciplinary approach based on primary sources, which may be visual as well as written, and may extend to materials in a wide range of vernaculars and ancient languages. The authors of the series have addressed in particular the relationship between classical scholarship and the Christian tradition, the influence of modes of transmission on the uptake of ideas, the contributions of great scholars to the learning of their day, and the study of the Italian and Northern manifestations of humanism and their aftermath.

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# The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages

MARY CARRUTHERS

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## *Preface and Acknowledgements*

This book, like most works of scholarship, has been several years in the making. If it reads like a set of essays, that is likely because it began as individual lectures, then became a set of seminars, and finally was thoroughly rewritten and organized into its present form. Two of the lectures (on sweetness and on variety) were subsequently published, as indicated in the Bibliography, but these have been entirely reconceived for this book. I have always preferred the essay form to the monograph, for it seems better to be brief and suggestive than to attempt to be encyclopedic. If these chapters start my readers thinking of other examples, including counter-examples, pertinent texts that I should have discussed but didn't, and more words they wish I had included, they will have served their purpose. It is deliberately a rather short book, *brevitas* being a trope (as I will argue later) that not only invites augmenting, but in so doing provides the motive force of further discussion.

I have profited greatly, intellectually, and personally, from many augmenting conversations during the book's gestation. The material was first shaped in talks and discussions at the Oxford Medieval Society; the Oxford Dante Society; the Medieval History, Church and Culture, Medieval and Renaissance Music, Medieval English, and Medieval Visual Culture graduate seminars in Oxford between 2005 and 2008. In 2009 I offered a series of seminars in All Souls College under the general title of 'The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages'; these became the core of the present book. In addition, audiences for versions of particular chapters—presented as talks in Bangor, York, Bristol, Cambridge, St Andrews, Durham, University College London, and Birkbeck College London—were most helpful in developing ideas and providing further questions to explore. I also profited from the informal observations and questions of colleagues during visits to Johns Hopkins University, Yale University, Harvard University, Cornell University, Northwestern University, the University of Tennessee, and of course on my home turf in New York.

My patient friends Helen Cooper, Paul Binski, Ardis Butterfield, David Ganz, and Lesley Abrams read individual chapters that were little more than shreds and patches when they saw them: their thoughtful comments and criticisms have been a crucial aid. In particular, Kathy Eden has been a keen commentator on rhetorical issues. I have learned much from her critical reading especially of the present Chapters 1 and 2, and her admirable ability to distil an argument to its essential core.

I started reflecting on the issues of this book with the generous aid of a fellowship in 2005 from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. With the help, as well, of a year in fellowship at Balliol College as George Eastman Visiting Professor, I was able to frame certain key questions and settle regularly into the Oxford graduate seminars so critical to that early thinking. New York University throughout has been my firm anchor, both with financial support and with generous leaves after my years as departmental chair and humanities dean. In the autumn of 2010 I was able to spend a term at the Institute for Advanced Study at Durham University, where, in that great fortress-cathedral city, I developed ideas about 'honest taste' with the help of the excellent group of medievalists there. As the book neared completion, I was gifted with a senior research scholarship at Dumbarton Oaks, and worked (though all too briefly) with scholars learned in Byzantine traditions, especially on the matter of 'variety' and perspective.

This is above all an Oxford book, in particular an All Souls book. Following my election to fellowship in 2007, the seminars I gave were a culmination of my time in that uniquely supportive and generous setting. The Fellows, the Wardens (there have been two), and the whole staff have helped my work in myriad ways over the years, integrating me fully into this community of remarkable scholars. In particular, I want to thank Ian Maclean for first thinking that these seminars could become a coherent book and encouraging me to keep at it. The several colleagues on both sides of the ocean who led me to particularly helpful materials are thanked in the notes. Thanks as well to Charles Hope, co-editor with Ian Maclean of the Oxford-Warburg series, to the readers whose comments on the initial proposal I have tried to incorporate, to the editor Sarah Holmes and the production team at Oxford University Press, and to Laura Macy, for her good sense and care in preparing the index. Finally, I would like to honour the memory of two gifted medievalists and good friends, Michael Camille and Eugene Vance; I hope in their different ways each would have liked this book.

During the time I prepared these studies increasing numbers of complete series of edited patristic and medieval Latin texts became available for online searching. These have made possible the kind of lexical studies I have conducted, the primary means of my research, and it could not otherwise have been done. I am in awe of those scholars who produced their massive philological studies without such resources, often completed (if at all) only in old age and through the devotion of many assistants. Though I refer in the notes to the finding apparatus of the printed editions, I do so mainly to assist scholars in finding these citations online. Translations of classical texts, Latin and Greek, are mainly taken from the

Loeb Classical Library series (unless otherwise indicated), readily available to most scholars and soon to become more so when published fully online. Biblical references use the numbering of the Latin Vulgate text. Translations of medieval Latin texts, unless indicated otherwise in the notes, are my own, though I freely consulted others, listed in my Bibliography.

Mary Carruthers

*All Souls College*

*May 2012*

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## *Contents*

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>List of Plates</i>               | x   |
| <i>List of Abbreviations</i>        | xi  |
| Introduction: Making Sense          | 1   |
| 1. Artful Play                      | 16  |
| 2. Sensory Complexion and Style     | 45  |
| 3. Taking the Bitter with the Sweet | 80  |
| 4. Taste and Good Taste             | 108 |
| 5. Varietas                         | 135 |
| 6. Ordinary Beauty                  | 165 |
| <i>Bibliography</i>                 | 206 |
| <i>General Index</i>                | 227 |
| <i>Index of Words</i>               | 231 |

## *List of Plates*

- 1 Beginning of Cicero, *De inventione*. British Library MS Burney 275, fo. 120<sup>r</sup> (detail)
- 2 Beginning of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. British Library MS Burney 275, fo. 143<sup>r</sup> (detail)
- 3 Beginning of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. British Library MS Burney 275, fo. 184<sup>r</sup> (detail)
- 4 Jacobus Publicius, 'A sphere for combining real letters', from *Ars memoriae* (Venice: Ratdolt, 1482)
- 5 The Rupertus Cross. Anglo-Saxon, second half of the 8th century
- 6 Marble panel in the entrance porch, Hagia Sophia
- 7 Plaster painted as a faux marble panel, on the north wall of the tribune, Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe
- 8 Beginning of Ps. 52, 'Dixit insipiens'. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 366, fo. 72<sup>r</sup>
- 9 'Glorieuse Achevissance', from *Les douze dames de rhétorique*. Cambridge University Library MS Nn 3.2, fo. 37<sup>v</sup>
- 10 Marble columns, and marble arch and triforium decoration in the nave, San Miniato al Monte, Florence
- 11 Columns painted (over plaster) as marbles, and arches painted as regular masonry courses, in the nave, Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe

## *List of Abbreviations*

|                         |                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Aen.</i>             | Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>                                                                                                |
| CCCM                    | Corpus christianorum, continuatio medievalis                                                                         |
| CCSL                    | Corpus christianorum, series latina                                                                                  |
| <i>CIMAGL</i>           | <i>Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin</i>                                                              |
| <i>Conf.</i>            | Augustinus Aurelius, <i>Confessiones</i>                                                                             |
| CSEL                    | Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum                                                                         |
| <i>De civ. Dei</i>      | Augustinus Aurelius, <i>De civitate Dei</i>                                                                          |
| <i>De doct. christ.</i> | Augustinus Aurelius, <i>De doctrina christiana</i>                                                                   |
| <i>De invent.</i>       | Cicero, <i>De inventione</i>                                                                                         |
| <i>De memoria</i>       | Aristotle, <i>De memoria et reminiscentia</i>                                                                        |
| <i>De off.</i>          | Cicero, <i>De officiis</i>                                                                                           |
| <i>De orat.</i>         | Cicero, <i>De oratore libri iii</i>                                                                                  |
| <i>De sensu</i>         | Aristotle, <i>De sensu et sensato</i>                                                                                |
| <i>De trin.</i>         | Augustinus Aurelius, <i>De trinitate</i>                                                                             |
| <i>DS</i>               | M. Viller et al. (eds.), <i>Dictionnaire de spiritualité: ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire</i>            |
| <i>Enarr. in Ps.</i>    | Augustinus Aurelius, <i>Enarrationes in Psalmis</i>                                                                  |
| <i>Etym.</i>            | Isidore of Seville, <i>Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx</i>                                                      |
| <i>Inst. orat.</i>      | Quintilian, <i>Institutio oratoriae libri xii</i>                                                                    |
| <i>JWCI</i>             | <i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>                                                               |
| LCL                     | Loeb Classical Library                                                                                               |
| Lewis & Short           | Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (eds.), <i>A Latin Dictionary</i>                                                |
| Liddell & Scott         | H. A. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones (eds.), <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th edn                            |
| LLT-A                   | Library of Latin Texts, Series A (Brepols) [online by subscription]                                                  |
| <i>MED</i>              | <i>Middle English Dictionary</i> < <a href="http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/">http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/</a> > |
| <i>Meta.</i>            | Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>                                                                                           |
| MGH                     | Monumenta germaniae historica (Brepols) [online by subscription]                                                     |
| MRTS                    | Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies                                                                           |

|                      |                                                                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>NE</i>            | Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>                                         |
| <i>OED</i>           | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> [online]                                    |
| <i>OLD</i>           | P. G. W. Glare (ed.), <i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>                         |
| <i>PG</i>            | J.-P. Migne et al. (eds.), <i>Patrologia cursus completus, series graeca</i> |
| <i>PIMS</i>          | Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies Press                               |
| <i>PL</i>            | J.-P. Migne et al. (eds.), <i>Patrologia cursus completus, series latina</i> |
| <i>PN</i>            | Geoffrey of Vinsauf, <i>Poetria nova</i>                                     |
| <i>RB</i>            | <i>Regula Benedicti</i>                                                      |
| <i>Rhet. ad Her.</i> | [Cicero], <i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>                                      |
| <i>Rhet.</i>         | Aristotle, <i>De rhetorica</i>                                               |
| <i>RLM</i>           | Carolus Halm, <i>Rhetores latini minores</i>                                 |
| <i>SBO</i>           | Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>Opera omnia</i>                               |
| <i>SPCK</i>          | Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge                                    |
| <i>ST</i>            | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa theologiae</i>                                      |
| <i>Tusc. Disp.</i>   | Cicero, <i>Tusculan Disputations</i>                                         |

## Introduction: Making Sense

Those masterful images because complete  
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?  
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone  
I must lie down where all the ladders start,  
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.

W. B. Yeats, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion'

### SENSATION, NOW AND THEN

In September 1999 an exhibition of works by recent British artists collected by Charles Saatchi opened at the Brooklyn Museum. Called *Sensation*, the show featured such works as Damien Hirst's sliced cow corpses and a dead shark in formaldehyde-filled tanks. In that innocent and optimistic time, the exhibition was intended to shock its audiences into some strong emotional response, as its title proclaimed. It was hardly the first art exhibit claiming to do so; indeed scandal has been a trope for shows of work by new artists for well over a century. Whereas in Britain, where the collection had been exhibited two years earlier, it was the animal corpses that occasioned the most public outrage, in New York the scandal focused on one particular painting, *The Holy Virgin Mary* by Chris Ofili.

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights (formerly the Catholic League of Decency) proclaimed its disgust; its president said the catalogue item alone turned his stomach and refused to see the painting itself. Several elected city officials quickly registered their equal outrage at the painting (which few, if any, had actually seen). But no elected official expressed his horror in grander style than the city's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. He threatened to cancel the museum's general subsidies from the city immediately. Though his actual power to do so was questionable, the grounds for his disgust were clear. All the works were, he

said, 'sick stuff', but the Ofili painting in particular was 'desecrating somebody else's religion . . . you can't do things that desecrate the most personal and deeply held views of people in society. I mean, this is an outrageous thing to do' (Barry and Vogel 1999). The mayor had not actually seen the painting either—perhaps he couldn't bring himself to perform such a disgraceful act—but he had been told about the catalogue description, with its account of using elephant dung and pictures of human genitalia cut from pornographic magazines. These were the two elements deemed by the mayor and the League to be the most 'desecrating' outrages to Catholic belief. The mayor's reaction was quickly channelled into debates over freedom of expression, and the furore rapidly died away in the press, though not in the politics of New York, until, like so much else, it was swept away by events two Septembers later. The judgement on the painting by the art critic for the *New York Times* was that Ofili was just 'tweaking people' like a cheeky lad who was being 'a little too cute' (Kimmelman 1999).

Both the mayor's outrage and the critic's coy dismissal are rationalized responses to the immediate shock and scandal this painting produces in viewers who have any knowledge at all of the conventions, artistic and doctrinal, within which it was produced and which speak through it. For the painting is not about 'a white audience's assumptions about black culture', as the *New York Times* critic also averred. Nor is it de-sacralizing. On the contrary. It is exactly what it says it is: a painting of 'Holy Virgin Mary', Annunciation and Incarnation melded in one moment, as is conventional in western art and sealed in Catholic doctrine. Indeed, the most curious aspect of the whole affair in Brooklyn was how such firm defenders of Catholic decency had failed so completely to recognize the central doctrine of their own faith. Incarnation has never been a comfortable doctrine to comprehend; it is, as St Paul said, both scandalous as an event and a puzzle philosophically (1 Cor. 1:22–23), and Christians have never fully agreed on exactly how it was done. Perhaps though, the League had recognized this doctrine in the painting, but thought (as had the Arians and Monophysites) that its full implication was too 'outrageous' to their faith, the painting showing too grossly the low earthiness of the body into which Divinity chose to descend. We now are more accustomed to a painless Incarnation: a smiling angel, a discreet dove, and a Virgin who looks like she's just won first prize in the world's best beauty contest, all looking to a birth that is all halo and no blood, and certainly doesn't involve any unspeakable lower body parts. (When some years later, another artist tried to exhibit during Eastertide a life-sized Christ in agony made all of milk chocolate, the League's outrage centred on the Crucified's lack of a loincloth, altogether ignoring the sharp satire of a

culture that preferred to cloak the torture of the Passion in sweet chocolate.<sup>1</sup>) Whatever Ofili's personal intentions—and by all accounts he is devoutly Roman Catholic—his painting is theologically profound and profoundly orthodox. It also taps into the deepest traditions of medieval European piety and its expression in art.

One wonders what the Catholic League would make of the following:

A cell has two shapes according to the habits of those living in it, not just pitiless for bodily things, but also pleasant for spiritual ones. It is a prison of the body, a paradise of the mind. It is a market where the butcher sells small [literally, pennies' worth] and large amounts of his flesh to God, who comes as a customer. The more of his flesh he sells, the greater grows the sum of money he sets aside. Let them therefore increase their wealth and fill their purse by selling their own blood and flesh, for 'flesh and blood will not possess the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 15:50).<sup>2</sup>

This shocking comparison is made in a work on meditative reading and prayer by the 12th-century Benedictine abbot, Peter of Celle. Even its English translator, Hugh Feiss, a monk himself, has judged it 'repulsive'. To think of God as a customer demanding ever more flesh cut by the butcher from his own body is—surely the League would judge—a 'desecration', if ever there was one. Yet the source is impeccably devout, Roman Catholic, and orthodox, composed in Latin by one of the great spiritual masters of the 12th century. The analogy Peter makes is between the work done in the monastic cell and a meat market, meditative reading ('a paradise for the mind') as selling one's own butchered flesh, and God as a buyer (and thus a consumer) of meat. Sometimes, through ascetic discipline, a monk may sell his flesh in parsimonious amounts, sometimes

<sup>1</sup> This time (Easter 2007) the Catholic League was able only to stir up the cardinal archbishop of New York, who—though he had neither seen the figure nor asked for comment from the artist, Cosimo Cavallaro, or the gallery—managed to get its initial exhibition cancelled, though it was later shown in New York without further incident (*New York Times* 2007).

<sup>2</sup> 'Est quidem biformis cella iuxta cellensium mores, dura sed carnalibus, amoena sed spiritualibus. Carcer est carnis, mentis paradisus. Macellum est ubi carnifex sui corporis nummatus et dimidiatus de carne sua largas emptori Deo uendit et quo plus de carne uendiderit, eo magis pretium acceptum cumulatus reponit. Augeant igitur lucrum et impleant marsupium de sanguine suo et carne uendita quia caro et sanguis regnum Dei non possidebunt' (1946: 238.35–239.4). *Macellum* occurs in the Bible only once (1 Cor. 10:25); by late antiquity it was clearly associated with the slaughter of animals, and then quickly, by extension, with the early martyrs, probably with a nod towards the prophetic text of Isaiah 53:7, 'he is led like a lamb to the slaughter [*sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur*]'. Isidore of Seville says that *macellum*, which he takes to mean not just a food market but specifically the shambles, is so called because cattle are slaughtered there for subsequent sale ('quod ibi mactentur pecora quae mercantibus venundantur': *Etym.* 15.2.44).

generously, but his flesh is nonetheless torturously consumed, in the name of and by means of a loving spirit—that is, by God.

One can of course tame these implications to suit a more modern taste, and dutifully note that monastic discipline encouraged an identification through meditation of the monk with the Crucified, so that the basic metaphor used here is clearly grounded in orthodoxy. The idea that the carnal must be turned to the spiritual is also standard teaching. The doctrine of redemption as fleshly payment for Adam's sin is orthodox as well. Still, the scandal of Peter's conceit remains, not only in the vividness of the butcher shop, but also in the description's emphasis specifically on commercial gain. There is a forcefulness, almost an anger, in Peter's metaphor that is not accounted for by traditional doctrine, conjuring as it does a savagely self-tormented figure, cutting the flesh from his body as he piles up an increasing store of lucre. The image is difficult to reconcile with the promise in the previous sentence, that the cell is a paradise for the mind. Peter's more usual stress, as in the beginning of this work, is on the need for moderation in ascetic discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly the shock of the carnal/spirit duality in this image is meant to recall the central paradox of incarnation, with its emphasis upon divinity assuming human flesh. Calling the butcher *carnifex*, a word used commonly in the sense of 'torturer' but not in relation to 'one who sells meat', recalls centrally as well the Crucifixion, and in a particularly horrid manner. The English painter Francis Bacon once revealed to an interviewer:

I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion... Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses... When you go into a butcher's shop and see how beautiful meat can be... you can think of the whole horror of life—of one thing living off another. (Sylvester 1987: 23, 46–8)

These remarks were judged 'bizarre and disturbing' in a review of a later book on Bacon's work (De Bolla 2004: 20).<sup>4</sup> They are. But no more so than Peter of Celle's image (which they echo) of the monk butchering his own flesh to sell it piecemeal to God in order to amass the currency of salvation. The scandal in Peter's image is as deliberately bizarre and 'sensational' as it is in Bacon's crucifixion paintings and in Ofili's Annunciation. Yet the critical coolness of a modern eye, that detachment which

<sup>3</sup> Peter writes, 'sine modo se affligere tyranni est' (231.9–10), a sentiment far more typical of him.

<sup>4</sup> It is unlikely that Bacon knew Peter of Celle's work.

the *Sensation* show sought to shatter, is nowhere in Peter of Celle's meditative prayer. His words strongly evoke all five kinds of human sensation: in the sight and smell of the butchered meat, the pain of lacerated flesh, the Deity as carnivore (for God did exact repayment in flesh on the cross), the cries of torture and slaughter.<sup>5</sup>

This figure is placed at the very end of Peter's treatise, its final statement. Just before it, Peter contrasted the monk's solitary enquiry after truth through prayer to the academic enquiry undertaken in cities by crowds of students and masters. He intended his rationally scandalous and sensational image as a vigorous rebuke to that particular intellectual scene. For just as Paul, in Corinthians, addressed groups hostile to and dismissive of the 'irrationality' of Christianity, so in this treatise Peter of Celle analyses the fundamental monastic task of knowing self and God through the craft of *lectio divina*, in response to a hostile new milieu (as he saw it) of Aristotelian-based scholastic argument. The claim he makes for linking up 'affliction' and reading, in other words, is not only a therapeutic but an epistemological one, having to do with the pursuit of truth. For Peter, reading is an act not so much of soul therapy as of rational enquiry and making new knowledge. The visceral energy in Peter's metaphor should be considered a necessary part of this investigative activity.

Peter of Celle was part of an extended circle of French and English officials including Thomas Becket, and was notably a good friend of both John and Richard of Salisbury (John dedicated his *Polycraticus* to Peter). From a noble family of Champagne, he had by 1148 become abbot of the northern French monastery of Montier-la-Celle, home to Robert of Molesmes, the founder of Cîteaux. He corresponded extensively—with Peter the Venerable and Hugh of Cluny, with the Cistercians of Clairvaux, with the Carthusians of Mont-Dieu, with Thomas Becket. In 1162 he became abbot of St Rémi at Reims, and a year later was host to John of Salisbury during his French exile, as he was also to John's brother, Richard. Like so many great 12th-century abbots, he was engaged in the issues of his day, including the intellectual debates. In *De afflictione et lectione*, he clearly joins his voice to that of John of Salisbury in his

<sup>5</sup> A mural painting from c.1100 in the church of Santa Maria Immacolata at Ceri in Lazio (Italy) depicts a butcher in his shop, with a pig roasting on a spit and sausages hanging over head. The scene is adjacent to the altar where the crucifix would have been, in the lowest range of a set of narrative paintings. I am indebted to Herbert Kessler for calling my attention to this painting; see Kessler 2004: 134 and figure 39. Labels on the figures in the mural point to Terence's *Andria* as their immediate source (a text known chiefly through the grammatical examples from it cited in Priscian's grammar). It is difficult to perceive any connection between this subject and the shambles in Peter of Celle's metaphor except through some common tradition of the Crucifixion as divinely chosen torture and butchery. A general study of the church is Zchomelidse 1996.

*Metalogicon*, defending the centrality of the trivium from the attacks of that ‘Cornificius’ who would demean it (John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, esp. 1.2–3).<sup>6</sup> Drawing on the traditional monastic contrast of noise and silence, crowds and desert, Peter writes:

To inquire after oneself in God and God in Himself [*se in Deum et Deum in se quaerere*] is indeed the one great question, but it is not insoluble if the search is unending and zealous. Actually, another inquiry precedes it, to seek oneself in oneself [*se in se quaerere*], which far reaching inquiry uses the disputation of solitude and is opened up through mastery of the flesh [*carnis edomatio*] as ‘a stool for its feet’ (Ps. 109:1), while this first inquiry is not yet fully solved. This inquiry is rarely undertaken by academics in the schools of cities and towns. Since it is hardly ever urged there, it is even more rarely completed. I would not banish their method entirely from our cloisters but they pay less attention to this one question, when they are involved in as many unnecessary as necessary ones and a crowd of people even forcefully urges the facile and chattering disputants to solve questions which have been raised. By contrast, our solitary inquiry goes better in silence and is more perfectly studied in solitude. It is of the heart, not the mouth.<sup>7</sup>

Setting his program of reading in direct opposition to the viva voce lecture of the university, and his method of textual study—*sacra pagina*—directly against the emergent method of academic commentary and debate, Peter makes a very considerable claim in this passage. He speaks in the vocabulary of schools logic, of a *quaestio praelibata* that can be *soluta* or not, and of *solitudinis disputatio*, borrowing the very language of the schools in order to claim the superiority for rational enquiry of the disciplines of *sacra pagina*: silence, meditation, and prayer. The main story of this intellectual struggle in the mid 12th century between the rival claims of university and monastery to be the proper matrix of knowledge is well known.<sup>8</sup> But it should be stressed that it was a struggle over the nature of inquisitive procedure and not a simple face-off between faith and reason (as it is still

<sup>6</sup> John’s description of ‘Cornificius’ bears similarities to Peter’s vacuous academics.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Grandis quidem illa una, sed non insolubilis quaestio, si perpetua et studiosa sit requisitio, se in Deum et Deum in se quaerere; praecedit quidem alia quaestio se in se quaerere, qua longa solitudinis disputatione et carnis edomatione reserata utitur tanquam scabello pedum suorum, nondum plene soluta praelibata quaestio. In urbium et castellorum scholis raro haec inter scholasticos uersatur, rarius finitur, cum vix moneatur. Non remoueo hanc prorsus a nostris claustralibus, sed uni huic minus uacant dum se aliis pluribus tam necessariis quam non necessariis implicant et frequentia quidem hominum fortius incitat forinsecos et uaniloquos disputatores propositas soluere quaestiones, sed soliuaga nostra melius silentio mouetur et solitudine absolutius discitur. Cordis enim est, non oris’ (*De afflictione et lectione*, 238.13–25). My thanks to David Howlett for his most helpful suggestions about the clause ‘qua longa . . . utitur’.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Chenu 1968; Constable 1996; Jaeger 2003.

often characterized) or (worse anachronism) some prototype of that between religion and science. At stake at this point in time was not the object of knowledge per se, for Peter makes that clear in the passage I just quoted. Both monastery and university, he says, are engaged in the same quest, of finding one's nature in God and God's own nature. It is rather the method and process of the investigation itself that is of concern. And striking in Peter's analysis is his stress on the biological and carnal roots of the monastic method: *carnis edomatio*, a reading method resting on the taming, training, focusing of the flesh. In contrast, Peter characterizes the new university academy not as too rational, but as woolly minded, only theoretical and insufficiently concerned with the real questions, an ivory tower removed from the shambles of physical life, that 'foul rag and bone shop' of which Yeats speaks. The theologians chatter disputatiously but their hearts are not engaged in their searches.

Engagement through touch with skin is the basic experience of medieval reading. Writing on parchment is even more difficult. As Sarah Kay reminds us in a fine essay on this subject, St Bartholomew, martyred by flaying (having his skin removed while still alive), was the patron saint of parchment makers, tanners, and all who work with skins. '[F]laying is the fundamental preliminary to all the subsequent processes—and potential damage—that parchment undergoes in the course of its preparation' (Kay 2006: 36). In many books the parchment is not at all the paper-like surface of 15th-century luxury productions, but a thicker substance, with folds, holes, and tears, one in which it is easy to see and especially to feel still the remains of the wool follicles. 'Hair-side' and 'skin-side' are two basic features of medieval parchment leaves. Making parchment involved 'processes that, inflicted on a living human body rather than on a dead animal, would be forms of torture . . . the drama of death and redemption, enunciated in the contents of pious texts, is also enfolded in the original skin of the parchment book' (Kay 2006: 36, 64). The analogy with the torture of crucifixion was not lost on medieval writers. Compunction, the wounding of conscience that resulted from various penitential prayers and meditations, and punctuation, the wounding of parchment by the writing stylus, were both from the same root, *punctus*, as puncture. One late medieval English poem imagines Christ speaking from the cross, stretched out like a parchment, the blood running red and black from him like ink, the scourges and thorns which have wounded his skin like the incised marks of a pen (Carruthers 1997).<sup>9</sup> This is not 'sick stuff'; this is commonplace medieval sense-derived understanding.

<sup>9</sup> See also Camille, who observes, rightly, that 'every turn of the page [was] an act . . . resonant with sensations, from the feel of the flesh and hair side of the parchment on one's

The essays in this book all begin from the premise that medieval aesthetic experience is bound into human sensation and that human knowledge is sense-derived, the agents of which are all corporeal. Human knowing results from flux and movements, from corporeal ‘affects’ as Aristotle calls them, feelings and emotions as well as recollections and rationally derived judgements. My subject is not the theology of Beauty, which is largely a neoplatonist and mathematical creation. Boethius’s treatise on music, the basic text of the schools curriculum throughout the Middle Ages, deals primarily with music that cannot be heard by human ears and is not made by human instruments (especially not made with artefacts like lutes); its prerequisite, as Boethius says, is his text on arithmetic. Theology speaks of God, and of His creation in so far as it reflects God. The magisterial work of Edgar De Bruyne (1998 [1946]), based on a host of well-selected, representative quotations from medieval theologians, from Boethius and Augustine to Scotus Eriugena to Aquinas and Bonaventure, deals with this divine, theological Beauty. As one traces his citations to their original contexts, one is soon aware that their overwhelming subject is divinity—the Trinity in itself and as expressed in its natural creation. Rare is the comment about human artefacts and the responses of humans to the artefacts they make.<sup>10</sup> Reading De Bruyne’s work and that of his disciple, Umberto Eco, one might well wonder if medieval people had any notion of aesthetic experience or judgement at all, or whether they could conceive of Beauty only in terms of Divinity (to use the old name for theology) and a pastorally motivated moral teaching derived solely from it and answerable to it alone.

Many scholars have in fact assumed just this. The result is a criticism of medieval arts that has become over-theologized and over-moralized to the point where every flourish, every joke, every colour and ornament is said to conceal a lesson for the improvement of the viewer or listener. Since these putative lessons are often banal and repetitive, or obscure to the point of incoherence, it is no wonder that many in the modern audience who take great pleasure in medieval arts refuse to read criticism by

fingertips to the lubricious labial mouthing of the words with one’s throat and tongue’ (1997: 41). Monastic writers emphasize the sensations of ‘eating’ their books, in rumination and reading aloud, as well as touching the parchment leaves; indeed for all the importance of hearing and seeing in the experiences of reading, touch and taste are equally emphasized (see Carruthers 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger has recently commented that theology and aesthetic response ‘belong to other realms of discourse’ (in Hamburger and Bouché 2005: 11). The observation has been made many times, for example by Michael Baxandall (1971); see also Wimsatt 1965: 51–71. But one must be careful as well not to introduce a falsely rigid ‘ring-fence’ between the two discourses. A persuasive model of how not to do so in the context of religious architecture is Hiscock 2009; and see also Murray 1996.

medievalists or are put off by its religiosity. If a modern reader finds something amusing in a medieval work composed before Chaucer it must be either unintentional or 'covering over' some sober doctrine in need of extraction.

But at the very least we should recognize the distinction made by Thomas Aquinas (and much earlier) between 'good art' as a moral judgement and 'good art' as an aesthetic one. In his discussions of the virtue of prudence, Thomas, following Aristotle and Cicero, and indeed rhetorical teaching more generally, distinguishes just this point. Art is nothing else but knowing 'the proper way to go about making a particular work'. And yet the good of such things depends, not on human appetitive faculty being affected in this or that way morally, but on the goodness of the artisanry. 'For a craftsman, as such, is commendable, not for the will with which he does a work, but for the quality of the work' (*ST* I-II, Q.57, a.3 resp.). Defining an art as 'ratio recta aliquorum operum faciendorum', he then distinguishes 'proper crafting' (*recta ratio factibilium*) from moral action (*recta ratio agibilium*), distinguishing 'to make' (*facere*) from 'to do' (*agere*), and quotes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 16, to the effect that craftsmen work ('fashion') external materials, whereas actions such as virtues occur (*agere*) within the human agent itself (*ST* I-II, Q.57, a.4, resp. and Q.57, a.5 ad 3).<sup>11</sup> A similar distinction lies within Aristotle's statement that the *ethos*, or 'character', of a speaker while orating lies within the speech, not whatever moral character he may otherwise possess. It is indeed possible for even the best of men to give an ineffectual speech—one ancient example was Socrates' failure to persuade the Athenian authorities of his innocence (*De orat.* 1.231–3).<sup>12</sup> The reverse debate question 'Can a bad man give a good speech?' is apparent in Augustine's insistence in *De doctrina christiana* book 4 (his own version of the ideal orator) that the best oratory is not a speech, an artefact, but a good life, and in Quintilian's much cited definition of an ideal orator as *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (a good man speaking well). Inherent in all these versions of the same idea is the crucial distinction, well understood in the Middle Ages, between virtuous living and successful art. One should also take note, as William Wimsatt (1965) reminded a generation of American critics, that Thomas Aquinas had specifically addressed the question of whether human writings could signify predictively for different historical times in the manner of the Bible—and replied that they could not. 'In no

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas makes a similar point in *ST* II-II, Q.47, a.4, ad 2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Inst. orat.* 11.1.9–10. But Socrates had a reputation as a superior master of eloquence especially of irony—Cicero also says that by not speaking he demonstrated a speaking style appropriate to the villainy of the occasion: cf. *De orat.* 3.60.

science, invented by human industry, properly speaking, can be found any but the literal sense; but only in that Scripture whose author is the holy spirit, the human being the instrument.<sup>13</sup>

The modern tendency to over-moralize the medieval arts is not just the product of some egregious misunderstanding, however, because much of what remains of what might be called art criticism in medieval sources is in fact either theological writing (of the sort mined so well by De Bruyne) or is contained in sermons and similar materials composed as moral counsel. It is in fact rare to find instances in medieval writing which recount what we would recognize as wholly aesthetic responses to and judgements of human-made artefacts and artists. So, a statue of the Virgin moves an onlooker to tears or to dancing, but then turns out to be the Virgin herself, who converts or confirms her audience in their faith—at which point the tale has become something other than an account only of human aesthetic response to a wholly human artefact.<sup>14</sup> We should not be surprised that pastoral materials stress virtuous life and the moral effects (good and bad) of artefacts. Nor should we be surprised that questions about aesthetic value appear to become more complicated in non-pastoral contexts, such as courts and great households (lay and clerical), where the inventive playfulness inherent in all the rhetorically modelled arts is better understood and protected.<sup>15</sup>

J. B. Allen (1982) insisted that medieval poetry was always and wholly ethical—his search in medieval moral philosophy for ‘the literary’ turned up only an ethical category. This is unsurprising, given what his archive contained. Allen went on to argue that all narratives offered exemplary stories for readers to digest, judge, discard, or emulate—ethical behaviour was to be modelled directly on such exempla. In the words of a recent study, ‘the lines between ethics and poetry in the medieval period are indistinct at best’ (Rosenfeld 2011: 4). Whatever pleasure literature offered was thus like the sugar coating on a pill—something to catch attention, entertain, make the medicine go down. According to this analysis, style is primarily the covering on some separate and separable content, *verba* on the one hand, *res* on the other. And indeed, as we will see in Chapter 6, style is spoken of as a kind of cladding, *venustas*, for

<sup>13</sup> ‘Unde in nulla scientia, humana industria inventa, proprie loquendo, potest inveniri nisi literalis sensus; sed solum in ista Scriptura, cuius spiritus sanctus est auctor, homo vero instrumentum’ (*Quaestiones quodlibetales*, quodlibet 7, Q.6, a.3).

<sup>14</sup> Ziolkowski (2010) analyses the complications of the *Jongleur de Notre Dame* story, which involves one such statue and an action of persuasive silence.

<sup>15</sup> The rhetorical aspect of medieval verbal, visual, and musical arts is the subject of the essays in Carruthers 2010b; see esp. 1–13.

compositional elegance is made through surface colours, whether of rhetoric, flavours, sounds, or paint.

Even Erich Auerbach did not entirely escape this Gibbonian mindset, which pitted Greek delight against Judaeo-Christian ethical sobriety. Of the Homeric poems Auerbach wrote:

Delight in physical existence is everything to them, and their highest aim is to make that delight perceptible to us . . . It is all very different in the Biblical stories. Their aim is not to bewitch the senses, and if nevertheless they produce lively sensory effects, it is only because the moral, religious, and psychological phenomena which are their sole concern are made concrete in the sensible matter of life. (1953: 10–11)

But this characterization does not bear scrutiny. Much in the Bible that delights the senses is not ‘solely’ aimed at doctrinal content (the sensory riches of the Song of Songs were justified through allegorical commentary after the fact; and some of its language was just plain delightful, as Augustine makes quite clear). Much in Homer seriously explores moral, religious, and psychological phenomena (fatherhood, jealousy, anger, and the dreadful costs of ill-advised war).

It is surely wrong to model all medieval literature (and indeed most other sorts of medieval artefact) on sermons. The characteristic styles of poetry are not those of homily. To cite a basic difference, well recognized in rhetoric teaching and in exegesis, a homily wants ‘plain’ style, the open, clear, conversational speech which can tell the truths of faith to all souls as though their lives depended on it—which of course they did. To speak obscurely on such occasions is not only discourteous; it is a kind of soul murder. Sermon style, as Augustine said, should mostly use either plain or middle style, only infrequently employing a grand style, and only when a preacher, for good reason, feels the need to frighten or awe his congregants towards their salvation. Strange words, intricate metaphors, ironies, all the figures of obscure language found in poetry, including the poetry of the Bible, need in sermons to be translated into plain terms. Preachers who use ‘difficult’ verbal tropes without such explanation are showing off, guilty of pride and vainglory; those who use obscure syntax and odd words may well be only ignorant and incompetent.

Just because surviving medieval explanations most often moralize the aesthetic, we cannot conclude that medieval people were incapable of understanding some of their experiences aesthetically, that is, as experiences distinctively occasioned by works of human art. Equally, they were capable of creating a work of art in order to evoke and shape distinctively aesthetic experiences, not solely to teach moral and theological ‘lessons’. One should not just conflate the question ‘Did medieval people recognize

experiences distinctive to art?' with the quite separate question 'How did they explain and justify such experiences?' A group can explain thunder with reference to the angry actions of a thunder god, but their unscientific explanation does not mean that they could not therefore perceive actual thunder.

Let me hasten to say that I do not think the ethical/theological justifications given in medieval accounts of aesthetic experiences are of the same sort as the thunder god's wrath, something that can readily be discarded when a better explanation comes along. Certainly they were not thought so in medieval cultures. They did not think of their pastoral explanations as rational overlays detachable from the underlying human experience. Rather, the pastoral (and indeed theological) reasons grow up and out from the human experience.<sup>16</sup> Medieval accounts of aesthetic experiences are usually modelled in terms of 'grades', steps mounting upwards (or downwards). But the idea of stages is fundamental to them: one step builds on the previous until one reaches the top, and (excepting miracles or Pauline *raptus*) there is no skipping steps, nor, when one reaches a higher step, do all the others become impotent and irrelevant.<sup>17</sup> And one should always begin, as an artisan must, at the beginning, even (perhaps

<sup>16</sup> Interpretation of all the arts has been dogged continually by the charge of being *ex post facto* analysis, justification rather than motive. Indeed rhetorical analysis, by giving as much (or more) agency to the artefact and the perceiver as to the composer, resolves this problem. To say that Panofskian iconographical criticism went too far in attributing symbolism to requirements that were solely 'practical' or technical in their goals is to beat a certainly dead, but also largely illusory, horse, and more destructively, to introduce unwarranted analytical rigidity. Often, symbol is absorbed in practice. An example is the medieval masons' technique of quadrature, using a square as the basic unit to lay out the plan of a particular building. This scheme was most famously applied in religious architecture. But the square cubit (in two and three dimensions) is also the unit of measurement for all the buildings whose dimensions are given in the Bible, which identifies God as the planner of most of them. So to find such divine geometry in medieval ecclesiastical architecture is not surprising, nor would it have required an arts education to appreciate.

<sup>17</sup> Bonaventure expresses this old idea excellently: 'Iuxta igitur sex gradus *ascensionis* in Deum, sex sunt gradus *potentiarum* animae per quos ascendimus ab imis ad summa, ab exterioribus ad intima, a temporalibus conscendimus ad aeterna, scilicet *sensus, imaginatio, ratio, intellectus, intelligentia et apex mentis* seu synderesis scintilla. Hos gradus in nobis habemus plantatos per naturam, deformatos per culpam, reformatos per gratiam; purgandos per iustitiam, exercendos per scientiam, perficiendos per sapientiam' (As there are six steps of ascent to God, so there are six abilities of the soul by which we ascend from the bottom to the top, from things outside to those inside, by temporalities we climb to eternity, that is the senses, imagination, reasoning, comprehension, intellection and the mind's peak, the spark of moral understanding. These steps we have planted in us by nature, deformed by guilt, reformed by grace; cleansed by justice, strengthened by knowledge, perfected by wisdom') (*Itinerarium mentis in Deo*, cap. 1, 6). Bonaventure's governing metaphor, as the title indicates, combines *gradus* (found as well in the first chapter of *RB*) with *itinerarium*, journey. According to this scheme, the essays in my book could be said to focus on *sensus*, *imaginatio*, and *ratio*.

especially) when one is expert. The model of building, one course at a time, each resting upon the last, is basic in medieval aesthetic. So too is the model of journey, itinerary, and path, *via*, *iter*, and *ductus*, moving actively through a work among its internal paths to its goal. For all their 'open' form, medieval works are not formless; they have within them evident itineraries and courses. The pilgrims may not get to Canterbury but it is the aim and scope of their journey (though there can be many side trips).

This book focuses on the very first stage of understanding, as it were, that of 'making sense' of physical sensations derived from human encounters with their own crafted artefacts. I hope in these essays to winnow from the discourses of morals and theology some elements that can be identified as wholly aesthetic. In the grand scheme of things, this may seem a reverse sort of winnowing, keeping the chaff instead of the grains, but I hope to persuade my readers to examine that chaff carefully, perhaps to take pleasure in it and even value it for its own distinctive sake.

My method in all these essays is an old-fashioned one, that of historical philology and lexical examination using the evidence in texts selected over a long range, since words gather nuance and even extend their meanings in ways we now perceive best in retrospect from this kind of evidence. This is in fact the method of Edgar De Bruyne himself, though I learned it first and best from the essays of Erich Auerbach. My first question in these studies is this: In the Middle Ages, was a distinctive lexicon used to describe such experiences, an identifiably aesthetic vocabulary not simply transcribed from ethical and theological discourses?<sup>18</sup>

## 'A CONFIDENT CONSENT TO BELIEVE'

Basic to medieval aesthetic understanding is rhetoric, the *techne* or art (in Aristotle's term) that 'finds in each occasion the available means of

<sup>18</sup> This lexicon is not distinctive in the sense of comprising a set of words belonging to aesthetic descriptions only. Rather all the words I consider are 'ordinary' words; they are often used in non-aesthetic contexts too, including moral and theological ones sometimes quite far removed from normal human experiences. I have found Peter Kivy's characterization to be useful: aesthetic descriptions of experiences, he writes, 'do not lead anywhere else . . . To describe something in aesthetic terms is . . . to savor it at the same time: to run it over your tongue and lick your lips; to "investigate" its pleasurable possibilities . . . Nonaesthetic descriptions invite further steps, conclusions, further trains of arguments, actions . . . And the fact that aesthetic descriptions are "terminal," that they lead nowhere, distinguishes them sharply from moral descriptions, which often are preludes to action' (1975: 210–11). For an argument that aesthetic terms (which he calls 'taste terms') are a special kind of (non-condition-governed) words, see Sibley 1959. The debate ultimately derives from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, and his insistence that aesthetic experience is 'disinterested'.

persuasion' (*Rhet.* 1.1). Medieval art is not only explained by considerations of semiology and representation, *mimesis*—though these are of course important—but also by persuasion. Persuasion is a process of bringing someone to consent to believe something with confidence in its truth. Instead of the Romantic maxim that art requires 'a willing suspension of disbelief', medieval art instead seeks to effect in its audience (or, as they were known in Roman rhetoric, its jurors) 'a confident consent to believe'.

Aesthetic experiences always include value judgements: so does rhetoric. 'Confident belief' (Latin *fides*) is in itself a value judgement. Indeed rhetorical analysis of an aesthetic experience always identifies three co-equal agents—*autor* (the performer and also composer), oration (composition/artefact), and audience (as jurors). All three are equally agents, for an occasion is an action unfolding in time, compounded of at least these three players, and so more like a play than like silent, solitary reading. It has often been said that rhetoric is essentially oral: this assessment seems to me true but inadequate, for it has led to rather pointless arguments over the relative 'orality' and 'literacy' of different cultures, and also to a tendency, equally problematic, to privilege interpreting verbal texts as the model for all artistic experiences. Assuming, as the Romantic maxim does, that 'disbelief' is the ordinary state of mind of an audience focuses on art as an illusion, how an artefact represents something other than itself—and this then leads on to discussions we have all become familiar with, about the 'reality' of art. It also presumes that suspending disbelief *precedes* experiencing the work. Perhaps this is required by the equally Romantic notion that art creates a 'charmed world'; in any case it serves sharply to divide an artefact from ordinary life.

But one can also think of all the arts—as I think medieval people did—as creating particular situations, social in nature, each time involving a number of agents including the artefact itself, a particular sort of activity, not a special state of being. In the presence of any artefact, our first question could then be not 'What is it (and what does it represent)?' but 'What is it doing (and what is it asking us to do)?'<sup>19</sup> Such a method places the focus on interactions of various opinions and arguments leading towards 'confident consent'. One striking feature of all the aesthetic values conveyed in the words I study in this book is that they are all attributes of

<sup>19</sup> A similar distinction is made productively by Bennett (2001), in discussing a 14th-century Franciscan crucifix in Montefalco. See esp. Rosier-Catach 2008 on how medieval academic grammarians dealt with the category of 'interjection' in speech, regarded as a direct speech act rather than a wholly conceptual 'sign' like the other parts of speech; she particularly associates an emphasis on speech as action with Augustine. Though she does not make this connection, Augustine's background in rhetoric would have led him to this conclusion.

*style*, intended effects of the artefact on the perceiver. The words ‘medium’ and ‘media’, which have become so crucial to our assessment of an artefact, oddly lessen its own agency. It is often now treated as the transparent ‘middle’ through which its composer may act upon a receptive audience, but without having important agency of its own. In rhetorical analysis, an artefact has direct agency as it offers means of persuasion, and persuasion is an action, a process not a state (although ‘confident belief’ is a state, to use the Aristotelian categories).<sup>20</sup>

The essays that follow focus on the Latin rhetorical tradition, and seek to be suggestive rather than definitive about the values in art that they attempt to trace. There is indeed a great deal of Latin in this book, but I make no apology for that. My task is that of a lexical archaeologist, seeking the strata from which the building blocks of later theory were quarried.<sup>21</sup> And though the material is mostly (though not all) religious, the aesthetic values I trace formed as well the basis of vernacular European writing about the arts, at least into the 18th century. I have set my subject as the *experience* of beauty (not the *idea* of beauty), and it will come as no great surprise that the essays are mainly about style, its agency and effects. Medieval artists and audiences, attuned to rhetorical values, cared greatly about style and were masters of stylistic complexities and refinements, of *subtilitas* (to use one of their own words). It may come as a surprise that two writers whose prose figures often in my analyses are Augustine of Hippo and Bernard of Clairvaux, usually considered arch-puritans, enemies of art and all its pleasures (I’ve been told solemnly that Augustine ‘hated’ music, and that Bernard ‘loathed’ all ornament). Yet they both wrote exceptionally skilful, even luxurious prose, highly accomplished in using varied ornament and effectively lush syntactic confections. I do not believe that a true puritan could ever write like that. Even when telling us how puritanical they are, their prose is wonderfully artful, as we will see. This crafted paradox, indeed this basic preference for paradox over resolution, for complexity over simplicity, for change over monotony, convinces through style as it never could through plain statement. This is a book about the pleasures of style and its patron saint is Augustine of Hippo. I hope by its end that I will have shown you why that is not just a clever oxymoron.

<sup>20</sup> A rhetorical analysis of experiences of art, which emphasizes an agency of the work itself acting through formal and stylistic means, is compatible with what the modern ‘Sensation’ painters seem to be after. Their works do not ‘imitate’, ‘represent’, or ‘express’ an emotion of shock (or indeed delight). Rather they act directly to produce it in the viewer, who is not allowed to be a dispassionate observer. As I have argued before, this is a basic medieval principle (Carruthers 1998; see also Baxandall 1985; Deleuze 2003).

<sup>21</sup> A loose paraphrase of Ludwig Traube (1911: 71); thanks to David Ganz for this quote.

# 1

## Artful Play

The Wisdom of God played before the Father's face over the whole expanse of the earth, and plays also before the face of those who learn how to join in Wisdom's play by rejoicing and feeling wonder.

John of Forde, sermons on *The Song of Songs*

### WHAT IS 'MEDIEVAL AESTHETICS'?

The idea that the arts create and occupy a charmed world (set off both temporally and spatially from normal, everyday life) is a familiar one in critical discourse since at least the late 18th century. By the late 20th, the nature of this specialness had been successfully challenged, as various critical schools pointed out how social and political agendas had in fact affected and compromised its secrecy (understanding 'secret' in its initial meaning of 'held apart') and indeed how deeply embedded in their own social contexts all works of art—verbal, musical, and plastic—inevitably have been. Marxist criticism, biographical criticism, new historicist criticism, masculinist and feminist criticism, post-colonial criticism—only some of the many contextualizing approaches to the arts—all have chipped away at the apartness of the world in a work of art. Nonetheless, the notion that through its style a work creates and claims for itself a 'charmed space' persists, and indeed is now enjoying a renewal, as the task of situating a work solely in its social contexts has seemed to involve suppressing its particular artistry altogether under the weight of socio/geo/psycho-political interpretative baggage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, inventor of new historicism, claims just such a special realm for Wagner (*The Ring Cycle*) and Milton (*Paradise Lost*) in 'The Lonely Gods' (2011), arguing that it allows both artists to explore philosophical problems with a freedom that everyday realism and ethics cannot grant (for example, incest rewarded, wars in heaven). The traditional philosophical genre of thought experiments (as also ancient and medieval fables and dream visions) creates just such domains too, used for exploring and crafting new ideas. Good discussions of the genre, using medieval examples, are Edwards 1989 (esp. 52–74) and Lynch 2000.

Yet in much modern understanding and interpretation of medieval arts and their products, a too often crude moralizing has prevailed, by which anything in any artefact that appears to violate the positive morality of the age, as articulated in sermons and ethical treatises, is deemed to be either subversive of such values or (more crudely) to be teaching avoidance behaviours through negative examples. There is no protected world for medieval art, this position claims, for the arts were seamlessly integrated, for good and ill, within essential medieval pastoral and theological values. The glaring exceptions to this principle—romances, for example, or the witty verbal and melodic contrafactals created for motet singing—are treated as though morally inferior, mere entertainment and play for lay folk, not for serious people like clerics. And with this judgement, the playfulness of medieval art, so readily apparent in all its genres, is conveniently banished, a symptom of the ‘childlike’ medieval mind. Which raises a pertinent question: Was ‘play’ always regarded as morally deficient in medieval cultures, whether of courts, schools, or monasteries?

It is certainly true that medieval culture claimed for human arts no charmed realm of the sort defined by late 18th- and 19th-century aesthetic philosophy. It is also true that the model for artistic work was that of an artisan/craftsman, not the inspired genius of Romantic aesthetics nor the observer/chronicler of modern realism. In medieval thought, ‘aesthetic’ meant ‘knowledge acquired through sensory experiences’, which was the basis of all human knowledge (that which was not divinely revealed) and thus necessarily included the realms of moral and political thought as well as that of the natural world. But to agree that medieval thought has no concept of ‘the aesthetic’ in the modern sense is not to say that the creation and experiencing of human artefacts (I include all the arts in this term) was for them therefore indistinguishable from any other sort of human appetite or need. Medieval arts were accorded a special status, but it is more like (though not identical with, as we will see) the ludic play space recognized by modern anthropology and psychology than like Romantic aesthetic. Ludic spaces are not wholly separate ‘worlds’ ruled by magic, but yet they do occupy a privileged and protected space within actual social life wherein all sorts of matters and relationships can be explored freely.

It is perhaps a paradox that so little overt aesthetic theory accompanied the production of such astonishing human art. Or so it seems to us. With a handful of exceptions, medieval thinkers produced a (Neoplatonist) theology of Beauty, but not a distinct philosophy of human art. The only common analogy in theological writing that references human art-making likens God creating Nature to an artisan (*artifex*), particularly in the way his mental planning (*logos, consilium*) is expressed in his creation. Only

music-making is treated in a manner that we might now regard as truly theoretical, and even then, the most influential academic treatise, Boethius's *De musica*, addresses mainly cosmic and mathematical ratios which cannot be heard by human ears. The bulk of medieval writing about human arts is entirely practical. It includes many recipes for mixing colours and for preparing surfaces. Or it teaches particular groups—for instance, novice monks—how to sing a particular kind of music for the divine offices. Or else it takes the form of commentary on ancient manuals of invention and style, including Horace's *Art of Poetry* as well as Cicero's *On Invention*. One central argument of this book is that human arts—verbal, musical, architectural, sculptural, graphic, and the multimedia experiences of liturgies, religious and civic—were composed and experienced on the model of classical rhetoric, and indeed that it is to rhetoric and not theology that one should go first to understand its character. One should also keep in mind that by the early 12th century, some aspects of classical rhetoric were being taught in Paris as part of moral philosophy, a development presaged by Alcuin's late 8th-century *On Rhetoric and the Virtues*, imagined as a dialogue with Charlemagne. Indeed, moral philosophy was always an aspect of rhetorical teaching (and vice versa): Cicero's *De inventione* contains a discourse on the virtues (those which came to be called the four cardinal virtues), and his *De officiis* treats many of the same matters, using a lexicon similar to that of his rhetorical treatises. But rhetoric was never completely elided with moral philosophy, nor lost its essential definition as an art, a *techne* like other arts (Carruthers 2010b: 1–13).<sup>2</sup>

## THE GAME OF CREATION

Perhaps the most influential modern theoretical work on the nature of play spaces is *Homo ludens*, by the medieval historian, Johan Huizinga. Huizinga defined the playground as a space and time set apart from ordinary life, and thus a place that is ethically suspended and subject only to its own ludic rules, which can encompass all sorts of masquerading, magic, deceptions, and contradictions if those are part of the game. Few now would agree that the playing fields of art are entirely removed from ordinary life. Much else in Huizinga's analysis is, I think, hampered by his acceptance of Romantic aesthetic; hence he spends much time worrying pointlessly about whether Beauty is a proper product of the

<sup>2</sup> Some items in the lexical overlap of practical rhetoric and moral philosophy are the subject of Chapter 4.

playground (he concludes it is not, except accidentally), and to what extent 'disinterest' is a necessary criterion for its participants. (He argues for excluding all the plastic arts from true play because they are produced by labour and craft—by his definition that renders them not playful.)

Yet aspects of Huizinga's analysis remain helpful. First of all, he recognized that a playground is different from ordinary life and social mores, and so constitutes a freely experimental space. He also recognized a strong connection between play and human creativity, though he keeps play quite separate from art, largely on the grounds that play does not aim to create Beauty, an opinion that respects (too much, I think) Romantic aesthetic philosophy. We should not now be so constrained—medieval aesthetic was not. Human creativity, like that of Nature, was always recognized as having a powerful ludic component. Huizinga stressed the separation of this space from daily life; other modernist writers have emphasised its charmed and even magical properties. These are contrasts made in terms of genre, of kind—the genre of 'everyday', we say, is different in nature from the genre of 'play', as 'the comic' is different from 'the serious'. But as I will stress in this book, there is not much developed speculation about the nature of genres in medieval writing on literature, let alone about genre in the other arts. Theorizing literary genres is a more typical concern of later humanism.<sup>3</sup>

Huizinga argued that a complete separation of play world from everyday world was necessary in order to warrant freedom for invention and creation. Medieval writers stress instead differences in procedures and methods. The contrast a medieval author such as Hugh of St Victor drew was between kinds of activities rather than 'worlds' or genres. In his work on the liberal arts, *Didascalicon* (c.1128), Hugh contrasts formal 'lecture' (*lectio*) of a text—which goes through it in its particular order from start to end leaving out no medial step—and 'meditation', constrained, he says, by none of lecture's rules, but moving freely within and outside the work to graze in its pastures as it wishes. The freer play of meditation for Hugh was a refreshing contrast to the rigorous method of lecture, and it is flexible in ways that serial commenting can never quite be, but it depends on lecture, rather than being wholly different in kind (*Didascalicon*, 3.7–10).<sup>4</sup> It should always be remembered that in ancient

<sup>3</sup> On early modern fascination with genre theories, see Javitch 1991 and Reiss 1992.

<sup>4</sup> The contrast Hugh makes is between reading *ordine*, 'in order', and reading 'without being restrained by methodical regularity' (*meditatio principium sumit a lectione; nullis tamen stringitur regulis*). The two kinds of reading work together intellectually, indeed vary as periods of 'serious' serial reading and 'playful' meditation (but not mere wool-gathering—meditation has a plan, *consilium*: 'Meditatio est cogitatio frequens cum consilio' ('meditation is frequent thinking according to a plan') (*Didascalicon*, 3.10)).

Latin *meditatio* was a disciplined exercise, indeed a word often reserved in classical rhetoric for school compositions such as disputations, though Cicero also used it for a formal meditation on a philosophical topic. *Meditatio* is only free within bounds, like play having both agreed limits and umpires.

Early modern humanists revived what they considered to have been an ancient opposition of the world of work and the world of play. It is this sharp contrast, which carries forwards into the Romantic aesthetic of art's charmed world, that so influenced Huizinga and many other modern theorists. Its essential features are encapsulated in a vignette from Virgil's Seventh Eclogue, when the older shepherd, Meliboeus, says that he will suspend the 'burdens' (*seria*) of his usual shepherding tasks in order to watch younger shepherds in their song contest (*ludus*).<sup>5</sup> Here is ancient authority for the association of play with recreation, specifically with making poetry (for this is a pastoral), for the association of work with burdensome 'seriousness', and for an absolute opposition between daily routines (*seria*) and creative play, so much so that it has been earnestly claimed that 'seriousness' cannot incorporate any laughter.

But when *serius* (or more often *seria*) occurs in medieval Latin, it refers to burdens as in 'burdens of office', not to literary or philosophical earnestness, as in 'serious ideas' or when we ask someone to stop joking and 'be serious'. The English medieval word *seriousli* derives from a different idea, Latin *series* (English 'series'), 'in a series', a synonym of 'orderly'.<sup>6</sup> *Honestus*, the medieval Latin aesthetic value that seems closest to what we now mean by 'serious' is not used as an opposite of *ludus* (as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5).

The conclusion to draw, however, is not that medieval people had no sense of play, laughter, or creative pleasure.<sup>7</sup> Human making in each of the arts is thought of as witty game and generative playing, with particular procedures involving the rhetorically modelled trilateral agency of artisan/

<sup>5</sup> Hanning 2010 has a discerning discussion of these issues in Ovid and Chaucer.

<sup>6</sup> The modern synonym of *serious*, 'earnest', is used in contrast to 'game' famously by Chaucer, defending himself from any charge of poor taste in recounting the Miller's Tale: 'And eke men shal nat maken ernest of game' (A.3186; cf. A.1125). Middle English *seriousli* (only the abverbial form is attested) means 'in order' (*MED*, s.v. *serio(u)sli*; cf. s.v. *ordre*). English *serious*, in the modern sense of 'grave, earnest', is an early modern development, from late medieval French (*OED*, s.v. *serious*). Chaucer's clear opposing of 'earnest' to 'play' is, I think, a significant symptom of his humanism and early modernity, rather than—as is sometimes carelessly argued—a remnant of his medievalness. *Earnest* is an entirely English word; Anglo-Saxon in origin, it occurs (though rarely) as an adjective in Middle English, meaning 'ardent, intense'; see *OED*, s.v. *earnest* (adj.).

<sup>7</sup> One of the best books on this subject remains Lanham 1976. Wit has always had a crucial role in theology: as Walter Ong (1947) observed long ago, wit and wordplay are at the heart of Christian mystery.

performer/orator, artefact (in the various media), and audience/umpire/judge. It is not possible to isolate one or two of these agents without distorting the whole experience. Like games, artefacts are always made up. An obvious point, but often ignored. They are not everyday life but they are a figment or 'making' of it. Figments are partial, they are derivative, and, if successful, they have persuasive 'charm' (*charis, dulcis*, an aesthetic notion examined in much greater detail in Chapter 3). But they are not entirely separate from ordinary life. The historian Edgar Wind said that 'the aim of any artist is to produce a persuasive figment'—his choice of the adjective *persuasive* is key (Wind 1965: 28, 131). He was arguing against both those who held that true art was only 'pure' form and those who—as Wind recognized—just reversed the initial error by insisting that art was only engaged properly with the actual world, a sort of propaganda. But '[t]o blur the difference between figment and fact is fatally to narrow artistic perception', and, to their detriment, divide two things that should interact. Artefacts are always in play exactly on the ground created through the tension between figment and actual, as are their creators when making them and we in experiencing them.

Medievalists have begun to pay attention to Thomas Aquinas's valuation of play (in commentaries we will examine in the next chapter), but positive opinions of *ludus* are still said to have developed only with the scholastic studies of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* from the late 13th century.<sup>8</sup> But the Middle Ages did not need to wait for Aristotle to teach them to value play positively, specifically with respect to creativity, for biblical texts had already made links between wisdom, play, and creation. In Proverbs, Wisdom describes how she was with God as the world was created: 'I was before him forming all things: and was delighted every day, playing before him [*ludens coram eo*] at all times; Playing [*ludens*] in the world: and my delights [*deliciae*] were to be with the children of men' (Prov. 8:30–1).<sup>9</sup> The world itself was brought into being through the delighted ludic energy of the Trinity. The English Cistercian abbot, John of Forde, who in the early 13th century completed the sermons on the Song of Songs begun by Bernard of Clairvaux some

<sup>8</sup> As argued by Olson 1982 and, more strongly, Rosenfeld 2011.

<sup>9</sup> 'Cum eo eram cuncta componens et delectabar per singulos dies ludens coram eo omni tempore; ludens in orbe terrarum et deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum.' The traditional gloss for this verse understood *ludens* as synonymous with *gaudens*, and interpreted it to be about the Trinitarian mystery, the Son (as Sapientia) being generated together with the Father. Abelard understood *ludens* to express the generative energy of the Trinity in an act of self-parturition, Father 'begetting' Son (as Wisdom) and Spirit (as love) (*Theologia christiana*, 1.5; PL 178.1136); so did Peter Lombard (*Sentences*, book I, distinctio 2, 'de mysterio Trinitatis'; PL 192.528). The theological speculation underscores a prior assumption that the word *ludens* denotes positive energy that both delights and creates.

eighty years before, captured this spirit well: 'the Wisdom of God played before the Father's face over the whole expanse of the earth, and plays also before the face of those who learn how to join in Wisdom's play by rejoicing and feeling wonder.'<sup>10</sup>

## LOGICAL PLAY

In *Homo ludens*, Huizinga also emphasized the characteristic *agon* or contention in games as the source of much of their pleasure and creative energy. Through their inherent oppositions, games create tensions; this tension is the source of both their action and the pleasures they afford to participants and spectators alike. And the tensive struggle is not only among the players of the game but between its rules and its actual practice in any given play.

In a later chapter, citing the work of various historians of classical rhetoric and philosophy, Huizinga reminds us of the 'playground' of argument and ideas created in ancient schools when teaching the language arts—grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic—for the procedures of Invention. This is the creative phase of crafting an oration. In the arts of dialectic and rhetoric one learned to cultivate a habit of developing propositions by agonistic argumentation—indeed Aristotle famously begins his *Rhetoric* by calling it the 'antistrophe' of dialectic, evoking the antiphonal statements of the Greek dramatic chorus, the call and response of *strophe* and *antistrophe*. In Latin rhetoric this method was known as *argumentum in utramque partem*, 'argument on each side' of a particular proposition. Its product was *disputatio* or *controversia*, the most advanced exercise of the arts course, throughout the medieval as well as ancient schools, and indeed well into the 19th century.

Many scholars have written about the taste for 'oppositions' found in all the medieval arts. Though claimed as typical of one century or another, an agonistic principle of construction and style can be observed in each of the arts throughout the many medieval centuries. This enduring habit of mind was produced both through grammatical analysis of texts (biblical and other), their style and propositional arrangements, and through the invention method employed in dialectic and rhetoric. As Huizinga emphasizes, playfulness was an essential characteristic of this ancient method,

<sup>10</sup> 'Ludit tamen sapientia Dei coram Patre suo passim in orbe terrarum, et coram illis quoque, qui ludenti sapientiae exultando atque admirando alludere didicerunt' (John of Forde, *Sermo*, 14.6; CCCM 17.198).

among sophists like Gorgias as well as Socrates and Plato.<sup>11</sup> Aristotle observed at the beginning of his *Rhetoric* that ‘the orator should be able to prove opposites, as in logical arguments; not that we should do both (for one ought not to persuade people to do what is wrong), but that the real state of the case may not escape us, and that we ourselves may be able to counteract false arguments, if another makes use of them’ (*Rhet.* 1.1.12; 1355a). Rhetoric and dialectic alone of all the language arts cultivate this practice of arguing both sides as a method of exploring an idea. They alone were also said to have no particular subject, for their method is applicable to all enquiry.

Play is especially a space for teaching, experimental thinking, and composing. Socratic irony is well known, as is the game playing that Socrates often engages in, and the special nature of the ‘playing-grounds’ that Plato marks out in his dialogues, for example the grassy bank under a tree outside the walls of Athens for the dialogue of *Phaedrus*, or the banquet room of the *Symposium*. The rhetoric master Gorgias of Leontini, who came to Athens to teach in 427 BCE, famously called his encomium for Helen (which survives) a *paignon*, a joke, in its wonderfully ironic defences of Helen, the severe complaints against her being already very well known from Homer. Indeed debating the merits of Helen became a favoured subject of school disputations.<sup>12</sup> Huizinga remarks that ‘[p]leasantries like: “You have horns, for you haven’t lost any horns therefore you have them still!” echoed through the whole literature of the Schools and never seemed to lose their exquisite savour’ (Huizinga 1949: 153). In medieval schools devils debated with clerics, and frequently won the arguments. Another favourite debate device (with ancient antecedents) was to name one participant *nemo* (‘no one’), thus producing much merry logical confusion. The legend of St Nemo, confirmed by the many references to *nemo* in the Bible and also in Priscian, is told in several manuscripts. ‘Nemo’ was a great biblical prophet, named in Luke 4:24:

<sup>11</sup> Vlastos (1991) has magisterially characterized Socrates the ironist and his playful method. The Greek Sicilian sophist, Empedocles (490–430 BCE), teacher of Gorgias, who jumped (or fell) into Mt Etna to test whether or not he had become a god (Diogenes Laertius 8.51–77), is identified with a logical method of *dissoi logoi*, analysing an idea (*logos*) by dividing it into antithetical parts; as historians (going back to Aristotle) have noted, his method ‘grew out of poetic composition, his philosophical arguments are cast in hexameter and his methods . . . are grounded in such stylistic techniques as antithesis, metaphor, and analogy’ (Havelock 1982: 200–60, cited in Enos 1993: 61); see also the study of Greek liberal education by Cribiore 2001. The Psalms as well employ just such a style of thinking, and as we will see Augustine too favours it—God, he said famously, governs human history as though with the trope of antithesis (see Chapter 2).

<sup>12</sup> Isocrates, a rhetoric master regarded more favourably than Gorgias and Empedocles by Aristotle and Plato, also composed an amusing defense of Helen. Augustine recognized the play aspect of such dialectical exercises in *De magistro*, 8.21, as discussed by Burnyeat 1987.

‘*nemo propheta acceptus est in patria sua*’ (‘no one is accepted as a prophet in his country’); among his many deeds, he was found worthy to open the Apocalyptic book described in Revelation 5:3: ‘*nemo dignus inventus est aperire librum*’ (Wattenbach 1867). These are grammar games designed for schoolboys just learning to parse their Latin. Medieval educational literature is filled with such clerical amusements and refreshments. Indeed the name of the master grammarian, Priscianus, was subjected to many indignities by students learning their Latin cases, because it could be so delightfully and salaciously divided (Prisci/anus).<sup>13</sup>

Debate questions still are more playful than not, for skill in the method is best displayed and success most readily judged as a matter of artisanry when the area of the debate is removed from ordinary life. There are some who believe that the agonistic method—learning to argue *sic et non* and *in utramque partem*—is itself immoral, but they are spoilsports, ruiners of play and rightly chastised as such. I had one such student, who refused on moral grounds to participate in a disputation that required constructing arguments in prosecution and defence of Chicken Little, charged with incitement to riot. This student—despite the fictional defendant and cause—refused to recognize exactly the special freedom of the play court, which made this exercise ethically safe, potentially beneficial (when encouraged just to have fun with the exercise, the student was offended). Medieval school questions, like the proverbial ‘How many angels can stand on the head of a pin?’ are in this same tradition. And it is not only a tradition in the schools but in medieval great households and courts as well, as Gerald Bond and Stephen Jaeger among many others have well shown.<sup>14</sup> Both in Latin and later in the vernacular court arts of the 14th and 15th centuries, the *débat* or debate poem was a favourite form of excellent creative play for the exploration of all sorts of issues, as demonstrated by the enduring art of the *Roman de la Rose* and the *querelle* it initiated, in its own time and later.<sup>15</sup>

*Sic et non* is a method both logical and rhetorical (and was not invented by Abelard). This is an important point because moderns have tended (since the 17th century) to separate these two legs of the three-legged stool comprising the language arts, to the loss of all. In medieval schools they

<sup>13</sup> See Catherine Brown (1998: 113, 177 n. 43) for another *nemo* example. On the ‘legend’ of St Nemo, see Wattenbach 1867. My thanks to Neil Cartledge for this reference. See also Ziolkowski 1985, and the wildly playful, often scatological verse disputation of Henri d’Andeli, ‘Bataille des Septem Ars’ (c.1230), in Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 706–23.

<sup>14</sup> Jaeger 1985; Bond 1995.

<sup>15</sup> On the debate form in various sorts of medieval literature, see Kendrick 1988; Catherine Brown 1998; Cartledge 2004; Swift 2008. Leach 2007 discusses opposition as a generative principle in later medieval music. On responses to the *Rose*, see Huot 2007.

were not separated, nor were they separated from grammar. A manuscript of the early 14th century, British Library MS Burney 275, written and painted in Paris for the then chancellor of the university, contains master texts of the basic arts curriculum (Camille 2001).<sup>16</sup> Plate 1 shows the historiated opening initial of Cicero's *De inventione*, the so-called 'old rhetoric', which was taught with a commentary from the 4th century by Marius Victorinus, one of Augustine's revered mentors. The figure of Lady Rhetoric sits at the left with a book on her lap, gesturing towards a king who is deliberating with his courtiers. They are all on horseback, all speaking among themselves; they have nothing written with them. Their situation is oral and practical. The next text in the curriculum (and in Burney 275) is the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* or 'new rhetoric', and in this picture a Lady is teaching a group of students by means of an analytical tree diagram of the basic parts of rhetoric, as defined by the text of the *Ad Herennium* (Plate 2). This figure is identified in the modern library catalogue as 'Lady Dialectic' but she cannot be only that, for although her method is analytical her content is rhetoric. Like the text she introduces, she is a bridge between persuasion and logic, rhetoric and dialectic. Next after the *Ad Herennium* come the texts of Aristotle's first logics, the *Prior Analytics*, in the Latin translation made by Boethius. The same female figure who teaches the *Ad Herennium* (identically dressed) holds up a tree diagram, but this tree shows the categories of propositions (Plate 3). Only one student is pictured, sitting between Lady Dialectic–Rhetoric and a black-robed cleric, who represents the university-level instruction that began with Aristotle's elementary logic texts. The Lady, as it were, has handed over her instruction to a more advanced curriculum, but she has not yet disappeared from the scene altogether. The point is that logic and rhetoric were far more closely allied at this time than they are now, instruction in each bridging the practical and the theoretical, grammar school and university.

Making or *poiesis*—what we call both creativity and artistry—is best done in a play world. Huizinga observed, correctly: '*Poiesis*, in fact, is a play-function. It proceeds within the playground of the mind, in a world of its own which the mind creates for it' (1949: 119).<sup>17</sup> The Greek word *poiesis*, like the medieval English equivalent 'making', refers to all human artifice, not just poetry. The Latin equivalent, *inventio*, yields English

<sup>16</sup> Grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic are the curricular parts of *Logica*, rhetoric and dialectic the two aspects of 'probable' argument (Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, 3.1).

<sup>17</sup> Twelfth-century commentators on Horace were familiar with the Greek concept as the origin of Horace's title (*poetica*), and understood it in a general way as referring to all sorts of making (*figere*) and fashioning (*fictio*): see Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 557, translating an anonymous 12th-century commentary.

‘invention’ as well as ‘inventory’, both the creative process and the materials from which humans make things.

In a treatise on rhetoric composed in Bologna in 1235, then the foremost university for training in law in Europe and therefore one in which the language arts, including rhetoric, particularly flourished, a master named Boncompagno da Signa included in his discussion of ‘artificial memory’ the following curious device for inventing arguments from materials stored in memory (par. 19).<sup>18</sup> Visualize, he says, a four-sided solid (*quadrata solida*) within a sphere. Then draw a line (*linea*) between the corners of the cube and across all its diagonals. To each of these points are attached words (or letters) signifying the possible logical coordinates of a particular proposition, each marked by a uniquely memorable image. The sphere can be marked off in zones, each labelled with another term. Then imagine the whole device revolving within that sphere, which will bring the coordinate terms into new combinations with one another. The number of possible combinations in solid figures is much greater than is possible on a simple plane.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the sphere is stipulated by Boncompagno to be the solar sphere, so that there could be three concentric spheres imagined within it (the Moon, Mercury, and Venus) also revolving, also with terms written on similar zones. Given its complexity, the uniquely memorable images would help one to track the location of particular terms as they combine variously in accord with the spheres’ movements.

This device, though inadequately described by Boncompagno, is recognizably what came to be known as a ‘wheel for combining’ terms (*rota combinatoria*), an early and influential combinatory logic, an imagined calculation machine (though it was also drawn two-dimensionally in manuscripts, movement was always implied). It is featured in one of the most widely circulated of late medieval/early modern ‘arts of memory’, that of Jacobus Publicius, a Spaniard who published his ‘art of memory’ first as a separate work in Toulouse in 1475/6. It was republished with some augmenting in 1482, 1485, and 1490, and was used throughout the 16th century.<sup>20</sup> The printed books all feature a woodcut of a square within

<sup>18</sup> Discussed in Carruthers 2005.

<sup>19</sup> A similarly complex cube structure is required to work out the coordinates as described in Grosseteste’s treatise on colour (*De colore*): see Smithson et al. 2012. It is likely that many drawings we now perceive as ‘flat’ because of their lack of shading and other modelling techniques conventional to us, were intended to be seen three-dimensionally. A common medieval example is the terrestrial globe, drawn as a two-dimensional circle but understood always as a sphere, as we know from many written sources.

<sup>20</sup> A translation of Jacobus’s memory art is in Carruthers and Ziolkowski 2002: 226–54. The importance of such arts of memory to later developments in combinatory logics was first studied by Rossi 2000; now see also Lewis 2007.

five concentric circles, as shown in Plate 4. Each corner of the square is marked with a letter, and various words are written in zones marked within the five spheres. At the centre is a volvelle which moves freely to make various combinations out of the letters and terms. It has been supposed that this 15th-century figure is one of the earliest *ars combinatoria* devices, but it would seem that something very like it was being taught in Bologna by the early 13th century, and, given the conservative tendency of pedagogy, perhaps was in circulation orally a good deal earlier.

The device incorporates the ancient diagram known as 'the square of opposition', itself a schematic of Aristotle's *Categories*, the elementary text of logic. *It is a logical invention device*. It is not just a novice's mnemonic to identify a set of basic syllogistic relationships. It is not static. Boncompagno makes very clear that the mental device must *move* in order to create new combinations of concepts. The square serves the generation of arguments and composition of new thoughts from those inventions. To oppose terms does not result in stasis, rather it affords new creation. And given that the basic model of all natural creation itself was the complexion of opposite qualities, it is no wonder that this habit of thought is so widespread and so long-lasting. With the freedom given by the spherical device all combinations can be put in play—the improbable, contradictory, and impossible along with the rest. The play of cube and sphere(s) freely makes combinations 'in every part'. The creative potential of the device resides not just in its elemental terms but in their multiple tensions, not only along the opposite sides but across the diagonals too (of which there are many within a cube). And if these relationships are complicated as well by the differing speeds of the inner spheres' rotations, a mind playing with it would quickly discover riches never thought of in quite that way before.

## PLAY, HUMOUR, AND THE HUMOURS

Ludic space has a particular shape in western medieval cultures, one resting on assumptions that do not easily fit either modern ideas about 'carnival' or Huizinga's walled-off, rule-governed playground, though it has some points of contact with both. Nor does the psychological concept of 'enchantment' suit. *Incantio* has strongly negative meanings in medieval social and religious teaching, but *ludus* does not. Medieval *ludus* can creatively entertain the sorts of oppositions, contradictions, monstrosities, and marvels that serious life does not, and yet its activities remain 'in the world'. In an aphorism much cited Aristotle observed that philosophy began and continues by people puzzling and wondering about all sorts

of things.<sup>21</sup> Marvellous fictions have more in common with the thought-experiments in which philosophers indulge and the fables they tell than with the totally sealed-off world of a cricket pitch or baseball diamond. The boundaries of a sporting ground are proscribed in ways that those created by medieval arts are not. Sporting grounds are unbreachable: imagined inflexibly, their limits decree that 'thou shalt not' reach from the spectator gallery into the game space when play is active, or that a player or ball is 'out' absolutely. But medieval artefacts are sociable creations, making a habit of inviting their audiences into their world by asking them pointed questions, opening up debates ('Who was the moste free, as thinketh yow?' asks Chaucer's Franklin at the end of his tale), or labelling their images with dark aphorisms and pithy mottoes inviting our expansive commentary, or unsettling our expectations by means of architectural or musical oddities. In this way an artefact is not at all walled off from the greater social world, though it produces a special kind of action within that world.

A second modern way of theorizing ludic space has been through the notion of 'carnival', which is a particular kind of charmed and secret space. As Mikhail Bakhtin saw it, 'carnival' is in dialogue with the ordinary world, but sets it topsy-turvy. Bakhtin, and more particularly his disciples, have analysed carnival primarily in terms of class struggles, a serious moral world identified with aristocrats and particularly clergy, against a comic carnival of the lower classes including artisans. These worlds are 'separated by strict temporal boundaries', in Bakhtin's formulation, one 'serious and gloomy' against one 'free and unrestricted', two worlds in which to live is to be permanently fractured (Bakhtin 1984: 131).<sup>22</sup>

This too is essentially a Romantic (as well as Marxist) idea. It also supposes a wall of separation between 'topsy' and 'turvy' (as it were), or, as Michael Camille (1992) argued memorably, between 'centre' and 'margins', regions as firmly marked as those of playing field and spectators.<sup>23</sup> Historically, this analysis does not hold up well as reflecting actual medieval labour and class divisions, for cleric and artisan were often the

<sup>21</sup> '[P]ropter enim id quod est mirari homines et nunc et prius inceperunt philosophari' (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.2, 932b, in James of Venice's translation). Aristotle went on to say here that myth-lovers are also philosophers of a kind, for myths are composed of wonders: '*philomuthos*, id est amator fabularum, philosophus quodam modo est; fabula enim componitur ex miris'. William of Moerbeke's later translation differs only slightly from this one. This became a key text in later literary theory.

<sup>22</sup> A well-argued critique of this formulation is Cartlidge 2004, which points out in particular its ahistorical nature.

<sup>23</sup> Burde (2010) takes a somewhat different approach. Cartlidge (2004) argues convincingly that most parodic debates, common in learned literature, also originate from learned conventions, such as *disputatio*. See also Janet Coleman 1996.

same person, and even when not—when, for example, the master mason became a learned architect—a work was planned and closely supervised by the learned and aristocratic (Binski 2004, 2010a, 2010b).<sup>24</sup> The *Roman de la Rose* was written by a learned Parisian cleric and an urbane courtier for the most sophisticated court of their age, which took both authors' work to their hearts as a source of ethical teaching.<sup>25</sup> The clerics who used the prayer books with grotesque and scatological marginal images were not scandalized—they commissioned more of them, and indeed made them.<sup>26</sup> Not all illuminators were clerics, nor do all prayer books contain comic painting, but where such material was the fashion, as for example in the Lincoln diocese of East Anglia, clerics and nobles alike evidently took pleasure in it without diminishing their hope of personal salvation.

Comic images can be found in the choir itself, notably in the carved misericords of the canons' stalls. The tropes these employed include an image of a man crouching with his nose placed directly under the canonical seat. This motif has caused some consternation among historians at a loss to explain why such a 'low' comic motif is found at the heart of the liturgy. A theory of generic carnival (especially when attached to class theory) is insufficient to account for such comedic detail in the most solemn of places. But the biological theory of humours can and does, for human bodies need supportive rest (as the name *misericord* acknowledges), just as (warm) laughter restores balance to even the most sober of (cool) seriousness. As I observed earlier, arguments about aesthetic value made on the basis of genre run into trouble when assessing medieval arts; very soon, as most scholars have discovered, one finds oneself admitting that in practice the genre of a medieval work is completely 'mixed'. At that point one may well ask what the reason is of such genre-based analysis at all.

Aesthetic judgements based on the effects of styles do resonate deeply in medieval practice for they involve the humours, the biological and medicinal properties determined by mixtures of heat and cold, moist and dry, and their effects on every aspect of human life. Many comments can be found in rhetorical as well as medical texts which recognized the general

<sup>24</sup> See also Murray 1996; Cohen 2008; Crossley 2010. Each analyses the complex roles of patrons, architects, and publics in the making and use of any major medieval church.

<sup>25</sup> Huot 2007 describes how the manuscripts demonstrate that readers were in continuing conversation with the work. This is a common medieval phenomenon, after manuscripts were more plentiful and could be personally owned by families and individuals.

<sup>26</sup> Sandler 2010 has traced the ongoing, familial relationship within a noble English household of the scribes and illuminators who were commissioned to make the household prayer books. These artisans were Augustinian friars themselves: see also Alexander 1992; Hamburger 1997; Sandler 2006.

benefits to health of laughing aloud. A lengthy treatise on salt by a Spanish physician and bishop (of Albarracín), Bernardino Gómez Miedes, brings together a good deal of this medieval material. His four books of *Commentaries on Salt* (1572) collect much medieval medical as well as rhetorical lore concerning the benefits of various salts (*sales*) for digestion and general comfort.<sup>27</sup> *Salus* (alternative spelling, *saluus*), 'healthy', was long linked to the root *sal*, 'salt'; the treatise expands playfully on the various extended meanings of the Latin word.

Having discussed the physical, economic, and medical properties and uses of salt (*sal physicus* and *sal medicus*), the bishop turns in his third book to the benefits of laughter, *sal genialis*—engendered by jests, jokes, and witty urbanity. Using this style is effective at great feasts and similar communal gatherings, he says, because laughter, especially of the sort that tickles the diaphragm and expands the sides and lungs, results in purgative, balance-restoring explosions of air through the mouth. Such laughing warms everything up biologically, psychologically, and socially, counters melancholy, defuses quarrels, promotes friendship, and also helps to keep one from eating too much and too fast. Seriousness (the words he uses are *serius*, *sententiosus*, and *tragicus*) is always cold, though it has its necessary role for health in tension with heat: 'For serious, sententious, and tragic matters, while not lesser [than funny ones], nonetheless more readily slide into the mind with laughter, such as jokes and silly things.'<sup>28</sup> (The adage, 'a spoonful of honey helps the medicine go down', has a very long history.)

The bishop is of course playing with the Latin double meaning of *sal* as 'salt' and as 'wit'. His final book is a discussion of what he calls *sal theologicus*, the redemptive 'salt' of Christianity, *sal*-vific *sal*-ve of *sal*-vation. The healing and persuasive benefits of witty mirth (*hilaritas*, *sal*, *urbanitas*, *risus*) against melancholy and over-seriousness (monastic

<sup>27</sup> There are two major editions of Gómez Miedes's *Commentaries on Salt*, one in four books (1572) and a second, expanded version in five books (1579). The work has been critically edited (2003) by Ramos Maldonado from the 1579 text, with an extensive introduction, Spanish translation, and notes (Gómez Miedes 2003). Unless otherwise indicated, my citations are from the 1572 text, available online through the *Making of the Modern World* database. (Paradoxically, this database now makes the incomplete 1572 edition far more accessible than the 2003 critical edition. Gómez Miedes himself expanded and extensively edited the 1572 edition for his 1579 republication of it. Relevant changes are indicated in my notes.) Classified as a text in the history of medicine or of commerce, it is just as much a text of rhetoric, a spirited and rich account of the virtues of *urbanitas* and witty style. The constant link it makes between medical and rhetorical properties is most interesting. It was a source for Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1608).

<sup>28</sup> 'Nam seria, atque sententiosa, Tragicæ dicta, dum non minore, immo potiore cum iucunditate, quam iocularia, siue ridicula illabunditur in animum' (*Commentariorum de Sale*, 3.53; 211C).

'sadness', *tristitia*, one of the deadliest of sins) is commended in texts from Cicero to Galen to Gregory of Nyssa; they become even more common in texts of various later physicians and practitioners of rhetoric—clerics all, like Bishop Gómez Miedes. Medieval ludic space is thus generative and creative (as the Wisdom books say), experimental, and healthy, restorative of eucrastic balance, intellectual health, and social comity through various mixtures of 'salts' wet and dry, hot and cold, jocund (warm) and serious (cool), salvific and (in excess) destructive. These are the varying elements at play in the medieval arts.

## HUMAN ART AND HUMORAL BIOLOGY

Gregory of Nyssa's treatise on human creation, *De opificio humanis* ('On the creation of humans', composed about 379, shortly after the death of his brother, Basil the Great), stresses three fundamental conditions of human biology. These ideas are common to much ancient philosophy: with varying emphases, they can be found in Plato and Aristotle, in Stoic teachings (including Seneca and Cicero) about the cosmos and human being, in Galen. I am citing Gregory not as their source, but as a particularly graceful expositor of some of their essential articulations.

The first principle is that human being, like all created life, is a compound. A blend (*krasis*) of matter and animation (*pneuma* and *psuche* as, in Latin, both *anima* and *animus*), the physical body is itself compounded of materials exhibiting elemental qualities (cold, hot, dry, wet) in constant tension and thus at best in a precarious balance with one another. 'Harmony' itself, in this biophysics, is not static (at rest), nor is it 'relaxed' (at ease)—humane harmony is tensive by nature, always threatening towards imbalance in one direction or another.<sup>29</sup> The medical theory of humours and treatment of disease is based on this principle; by adding or subtracting ingredients in the body's mix to keep it in elemental balance, organic health is treated as a precarious state teetering constantly towards disease.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> I am invoking the categories of Boethius's essential treatise *De musica*, well known throughout the Middle Ages, of *musica mundana* (the cosmic harmony) and *musica humana* (the harmony of the human body and spirit). On the unharmonized, unreconciled, tensive paradoxes evident in Gregory of Nyssa's theology of human decay and resurrection, see Ladner 1958 and Bynum 1995: 81–6.

<sup>30</sup> Greek physics and medicine of the Hellenistic age distinguished three sorts of compounds: *mixis*, *krasis*, and *synthesis*, 'mixture', 'blend', and 'fusion': one classic discussion is Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione*, 1.10, 328a–b. The distinctions are discussed by Staden 2000 and also Sorabji 2000. They played their part in Christian debates about bodily resurrection and indeed the Incarnation (as discussed in Chapter 5, on *varietas*): see

Arguing against an idea that the 'ruling principle' (the soul) can be localized to a particular organ of the body, such as the heart, or the brain, Gregory instead says that soul is in all the compound body, the demonstration of which is that the soul is affected and hindered in its activities just as much by a diseased liver as by a diseased heart or brain: 'Our analysis has shown that in any organ of the human composite, which conditions the natural activity of every being, the power of the soul is as nothing if the part in question is not functioning as it normally should.'<sup>31</sup> Invoking a common Stoic trope, he says that human being is compounded like a musical instrument, played by the soul:

since the whole body is made like a musical instrument, just as it often happens in the case of those virtuosi who are unable to demonstrate their skill because their instrument is unfit [for various accidental reasons] . . . so too the soul, which communicates with its entire instrument and which touches every organ in a spiritual fashion in conformity with its nature, cannot be effective when a weakness or fault hampers its activities . . . It has an affinity, as it were, with all that is in accord with its nature but is a stranger to what diverges from it. (Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 12.8; PG 44.161A)

A second fundamental principle follows upon this, Gregory says: all creation is in constant flux, movement, and change. As created, human being is particularly subject to this principle. A living human is a sack of more and less viscous materials constantly animated, even when asleep—it is never wholly at rest. The word *humour* itself means 'liquid' (*umor*), those vital 'spirits' that both animate and communicate among the parts of the body. Invoking a Heraclitean image, Gregory writes:

The material life of our bodies flows; always pushed forwards by this movement, it finds its essential energy in change which never stops: and as some river, flowing on by its own impulse, keeps the channel in which it runs well filled, yet the same water is not always seen in the same place, but part of

P. Brown 1988 and Bynum 1995. Marius Victorinus uses these categories in discussing the 'mixed' relationship of the virtues of *honestus* and *utilis*, both in ethical life and in artistic style (see Chapter 5 on *honestus*).

<sup>31</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 12.6: PG 44.161A; see also 12.13: PG 44.163D. The section references are to the translation of Moore in the Nicene Fathers series (1893). My translation consults the French of Guillaumin (1982) and LaPlace (2002 [1944]), and the English of Moore (1893). All subsequent translations of this work have been handled in this way. *De opificio hominis* suffers from the lack of a modern critical edition, which has been promised but not published in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*. The Latin translation printed in the PG is that of Dionysius Exiguus (6th century). On the translation history of this work, see Altenburger and Mann 1988. Among 12th-century philosophers, William of St-Thierry drew on it extensively in his *Dragmaticon*.

it glides away while part comes flowing on, so, too, the material element of our life here passes in a continuous succession of contrary qualities in motion and flux, so that it never can stop changing, but, unable to rest, its unceasing motion instead keeps proportion by alternating similar states: and if it should ever cease moving it will certainly have ceased to be. (Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 13.1; PG 44.165A)<sup>32</sup>

Complete relaxation would be death. In sleep, the body is instead, Gregory says, like a smouldering fire, dormant not extinguished. Only the nutritive activities of the soul fully continue during sleep; as a musician, touching slackened strings with his plectrum, continues to play notes but without sound except for 'a sort of uncertain and indistinct hum', so in sleep, when the organs of sense are relaxed, they respond slackly and faintly with images and sensations to the vague promptings of the sleeping intellect (Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 13.9; PG 44.169C). A similar idea is articulated by John Cassian, speaking of the human mind as being like a mill, in constant motion, grinding whatever is fed into it (John Cassian, *Conference* 1.18).<sup>33</sup>

The flux of our creation is not wholly chaotic or random. We move between opposite states, each giving respite from the other, for the opposite qualities of the human compound (*le composé humain*, in the happy French translation) govern those movements:

sleep relaxes the tension of being awake, and, again, awakening tightens up what had become slack: and neither of these lasts continually, but both give way, each at the other's coming; our nature thus renews herself by these changes as, while participating in each state in turn, she passes from the one to the other without break . . . regular passage from one state to the other in turn, at a proper moderate time, is a conserving power of nature, which benefits from continual transference to the contrary state, giving herself in each rest from the other. Thus she finds the body tensed up through wakefulness, and devises relaxation for its strain by means of sleep, giving the senses rest for a time from their operations, unhitching them like horses from the chariots after a race. (Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 13.2; PG 44.165C)

But mixture and flux are not the human body's only characteristics. Human being is porous, another fundamental trait. The medieval body is not a waterproof sack, but permeable to influences from all sorts of external agents, benign and harmful. Gregory of Nyssa likened it to a leaky leather bottle constantly needing topping up as its contents drain

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, Prologue.

<sup>33</sup> See Carruthers 1998: 88–99.

away (*On the Great Catechism*, ch. 37, trans. Moore, 1893).<sup>34</sup> It was thought open to astral influences, of course, yet more dangerous were influences from one's immediate surroundings, penetrating via one's senses. Especially powerful are sound and smell. Sounds, produced by vibrating air ('broken air', as Chaucer explained it), came thus to ears, which in turn communicated such vibrations to the body's spirits (one should always remember that these 'spirits' were a kind of fluid or perhaps also vapours, but not thought to be wholly incorporeal). Smells and other 'exhalations' of the air could be both sweet and healthful, or fetid—indeed could cause pestilence and disease. The screams and foul odours of hell are not only symbolic but directly affect human being, even in an unbodied though 'spiritual' state, as Dante, following traditional depictions of the afterlife, imagined so convincingly, both for inferno and for purgatory, where such direct sensory affects are given an ultimately healing role. Modern readers coming to Dante for the first time can be puzzled by his insistence that the spirits experience sensations—but no psychic or moral correction could occur in them without this.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, modern notions of a fully autonomous self are profoundly unmedieval. Indeed it is a peculiarly modern western idea, bound in, I think, to equally modern ideas about autonomous Beauty and the primarily self-referential aesthetic values which accompany it ('I know what I like').<sup>36</sup> Pre-modern bodies are too subject to manifold influences and their changing effects to be considered autonomous. Certainly there is a medieval idea of individual agency, moral, familial, devotional, salvific. But this 'self' is malleable and in motion, always penetrated by the world. The biophysical world of compounds, mixtures, flux, affect, and continuous movement among opposites is also the realm of medieval aesthetic

<sup>34</sup> See also Paster 1997, 2004 and the introduction by Maclean to his translation of Descartes's *A Discourse on Method* (2006). Descartes's psychology is deeply based in such ideas. But they are medieval ideas too, deriving from Galen and his Arabic commentators, though perhaps not so fully theorized in medieval medicine before the 13th century. Humours are liquids, vapours are gaseous: the one is internal, the other can also affect those around.

<sup>35</sup> In both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* the souls experience a range of human affects, bodily and emotional, though they have no bodies, and are only 'shades', or *ombre*. Exactly how this can be is a mystery, Virgil says, impossible to explain, but related somehow to the great mystery of Incarnation itself: see *Purgatorio*, 3.28–39, and Statius' longer, though equally mysterious account, in *Purgatorio*, 25.67–108. In *Paradiso* the spirits and the pilgrim are *trashumanar*, 'beyond human', and so appear to Dante as sparks or vague reflections. Odd as these doctrines seem now, such speculation came into the Middle Ages directly out of the psychosomatism of late antiquity, as Bynum (1995) demonstrated.

<sup>36</sup> Tambling (2010: 10) addresses this matter succinctly; see also Kenny 2003 [1963]. On the affect–emotion relationship in ancient philosophy, see D. Frede 1996 and Striker 1996.

experience, embracing all that responds to human-created arts and their artefacts.

## ‘THE DREAM OF THE ROOD’ AND THE SHRINE OF ST ELOY AT ST-DENIS

At this point it would be well to give an example of what I mean, both by emphasizing the ‘aesthetic’ rather than theological dimension in medieval discourse about art, and also how I would distinguish ‘rhetorical’ from ‘mimetic’ analysis. I have chosen an ekphrastic poem written in Old English, now called *The Dream of the Rood*, which describes an artefact; it also uses the figure of prosopopoeia, which attributes speech to a non-human speaker.<sup>37</sup> While not at first seeming to be about a human artefact, *The Dream of the Rood* recognizably describes a type of Anglo-Saxon liturgical cross or ‘tree’, ‘rood’, in use at the time it was composed. These crosses were often life-sized. An example is the Rupertus Cross (Plate 5), of 8th-century Anglo-Saxon work, designed for the cathedral of Salzburg. They might, like this one, be of gold hammered over a frame of wood, embossed with patterns of interlacement, and decorated with jewels of glass, garnets, or perhaps other stones.<sup>38</sup> In the poem, the tree’s own description of itself emphasizes the human hands at work in its making, the violent men who first cut it down and shaped it, and the human friends who found it dumped with the refuse, raised it, and clad it in gold. The visionary’s experience is clearly an aesthetic one—an encounter with a human artefact—for all that it is cast as a marvellous visitation. Indeed this sort of disguising of the humane within the unearthly (as well as vice versa)

<sup>37</sup> The version we now have was probably composed in monastic circles during the 10th century and copied into the Vercelli Book anthology of Old English works. The poem has the added allure that some of its words (a version of lines 39–64, the first part of the cross’s speech) were incised in runes, likely during the 10th century, on the great 8th-century sandstone standing column with mounted crossbeam (made of two different kinds of stone, and thus probably at two quite different places and put together at an uncertain time) that now stands in the church at Ruthwell. Much current debate is about when and why the monument at Ruthwell was put together, rather than about the circumstances of the Vercelli Book poem—a good introduction to those issues are the essays in Cassidy 1992. On cross artefacts in Anglo-Saxon liturgical culture, see Raw 1990, and also Schweitzer 2010, who has recently suggested a relationship between Anglo-Saxon metalwork crosses and various Anglo-Saxon poems featuring a speaking rood.

<sup>38</sup> The Rupertus Cross is described in Webster et al. 1991: 170–2, catalogue no. 133. Many thanks to Michelle Brown and Jane Hawkes for bringing this object to my attention.

is typical in medieval arts, one reason I have selected this poem to exemplify the sort of experience I am trying to define.

The speaker is asleep and alone when he has his dream at midnight, 'to midre nihte'. These conditions are significant, for night is the preferred time of poetic meditation, lying in bed its preferred posture. The dreamer has assumed a posture of composition, and his 'seeing' experience is both visionary and envisioned, a mental seeing. Indeed this ambiguous state is conventional for medieval dream composition (as I demonstrated in *The Craft of Thought* (1998)), as dream vision is a genre conventional for philosophical poetry (a tradition known best to the Middle Ages through Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, a work which also begins with the poet in bed, composing a poem as he sees in his mind the visits of the muses and Lady Philosophy). During sleep, the rational and sensory powers are in a resting state, and the mind is then receptive to all sorts of influences internal and external, including imaginings in the form of dreams that cast up from memory pieces of images formed in the course of waking, rational activity. It is a state in which the fluid, porous nature of human being is particularly evident, unordered by rational recollection or conceptual reasoning. Naked to his sensations, and thus to unmediated aesthetic experiences, the dreamer sees (*ic gesawe*) *sylicre treow*, 'an unearthly tree' that is and yet is not a tree. It is bound about with light, *begoten* (created) *mid golde* and with fair gems, including five set high on its crossbar. Attended by angels, it is not at all a dreadful gallows, he comments. The 'victory tree' (*sigebeam*) is *sylic*, 'unearthly'—the adjective is repeated twice in ten lines—an unnatural marvel (Grendel's glove and the great dragon in *Beowulf* are also *sylic*: lines 2086, 3038), and yet also recognizable.<sup>39</sup> The contrast between the *sylic* tree and his human condition (*ond ic synnum fah*), 'stained' with his weaknesses and faults, makes him wonder not only at the strange artefact but also at his sense of the distance between him and what he sees.

As the dreamer gazes, human blood begins to show through the unearthly glory: 'Yet through the gold I could perceive painful former struggle, for it first began to sweat blood on its right side.' His wonder turns to fear: 'I was afraid' (*forht ic wæs*). Yet he lies there for a long while *breowcearig*, 'troubled in mind', as he gazes at the artefact, which varies its apparel and colour, *wendan wædum ond bleom*. It shimmers back and forth between gold and blood: 'hwilum hit wæs mid wætan bestemed, / beswyled mid swates gange, hwilum mid sinc gegyrwed'. Shimmering is a vibrating motion, continual flux between colours and 'weeds' (that is, its

<sup>39</sup> The word retained this meaning in later English, before developing what is now its dominant meaning, 'silly' (*MED*, s.v. *selly*; *OED*, s.v. *silly*).

clothing or cladding, in Latin its *venustas*). This pulsing reinforces and feeds the perceptual flux of the dreamer's mental state, emphasizing his vulnerability both in body and spirit. He also repeats in several ways that he is frail and wounded: *forwounded mid wommun*, 'grievously injured with wounds', open wounds that can bleed sympathetically with the cross. The initiating aesthetic experience is characterized by fluctuation and porosity, in both the dreamer and the dream image.<sup>40</sup>

At this early point in the poem the experience has been described only aesthetically, in terms of sight, light, colour, and emotion. The 'tree' has not been identified: it is *not*, the dreamer says, like a gallows and it certainly is not a living tree. It is presented to the visionary as an artefact (*begoten mid golde*), possibly divine as the angels attending it might suggest, but it has as yet no content. Of course it is the Cross, clad in the gleaming gold and gems conventional in the great mosaics of Ravenna and Rome as well as in Anglo-Saxon crosses closer to the poem's home, but it has not been identified as such in the poem. This poetic fact is critical—yet too many modern translations of *The Dream of the Rood* (indeed the modern title itself) jump the gun, so to speak, by rendering Old English *treow* and *beam* as 'cross' and 'rood', even capitalizing the nouns—as the Old English does not—as silent identifiers for modern readers. But the poem does not allegorize its central experience prematurely, as these translations do—indeed that withholding is essential to experiencing it. The wondrous tree, unearthly and uncanny when first seen, yet produces recognizably human sensations: sights and sounds and emotions that domesticate its apparent divinity. As readers we are not required to import commentaries in order to make sense of it: the experience is sensible on its own terms, and indeed if we insist on glossing it from the start with external doctrines, we will compromise its artistic power.

Then the monster tree begins to speak. Its speech, as many readers have noted, is quiet and plain, almost colloquial as it recounts its experiences of being cut down and prepared for the condemned thief—no, the young hero (*þa geong hælēð*) who mounts it in triumph, though it was crafted as an artefact of shame. For it is indeed a gallows, and during the course of the rood's speech that dire conclusion becomes clearer and more persuasive. Indeed its status as a gallows is one of the matters of which the

<sup>40</sup> Proust describes a similarly fluctuating, porous state between sleep and waking, in his 'Overture' to *A la recherche du temps perdu*; similar depictions of dream states are commonplace in ancient and medieval discussions of dream. An example possibly known to the *Rood* author (either in the 6th-century Latin translation, or a later one in the 9th century by Scotus Eriugena), is a discussion of dreaming by Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 13.5–11.

dreamer must be persuaded. The poem is conceived as a rhetorical action: speaker (the cross), work (its speech delivered with gesture and costume, voice, and ‘face’ or appearance), and dreamer (audience and judge) are all constantly involved with one another.<sup>41</sup> At the end the judge (the dreamer) is persuaded to confident belief in the cross’s directives to him, and he ends ‘in joyous mind’ (*blyðe mode*), vowing to follow the cross before all else into the great feast and pleasures of heaven. He recognizes at last that the glorious tree is a gallows (*gealgtreowe*) but the route to joy not shame, through the essential incarnational paradox.

The doctrinal content is unremarkable, and surely the least of this poem’s many merits. But more than that—the bare doctrinal statement seems banal to the point of disproportion as a measure of artistic merit. It has been suggested that the poem is associated with the liturgy of Easter, an attractive possibility.<sup>42</sup> For belief is not just a matter of accepting particular content but also of confidence, *fides*. This is a basic tenet of rhetoric, ancient and medieval. As Bene of Florence observed, particularly through the delivery (*actio/pronunciatio*)<sup>43</sup> of a speech a listener is won over and led by persuasive means to confident belief (‘ut concilietur auditor et ad fidem persuasione ducatur’). Confidence is produced not by dogma alone or only by necessary proofs (which are most often not available). It comes about, Bene says, as a listener ‘warms up’ to the truth of the doctrines through his experienced emotions and feelings (‘ut animorum motibus incalescat’).<sup>44</sup> The stress in *The Dream of the Rood* is on how the auditor/visionary *feels*, the change in him from distress to joy, caused gradually through his sympathy with and belief in the story as the

<sup>41</sup> A recent study of the prose homilies in the Vercelli Book demonstrates cogently the rhetorical sophistication of the anthology’s compiler and implied audience (Zacher 2009). Zacher does not argue for a single author for these sermons, as she makes clear, but she does suggest that the matrix of sophisticated rhetorical practice which I am positing for *The Dream of the Rood* was not inconceivable when composing Old English as well as Latin pastoral and devotional works. Aspect, gesture, and voice—*vultus*, *gestus*, *vox*—are traditionally the three matters to be especially heeded in rhetorical delivery. On the common interaction of clergy and laity in the Anglo-Saxon church, see Blair 2005: 135–81.

<sup>42</sup> Fortunatus’s great hymn to the Cross, *Pange lingua* (which we will look at in Chapter 3) is stipulated to be sung during the Good Friday *adoratio crucis* liturgy in the reformed Benedictine *Regularis concordia* (c.973; see Ó Carragáin 1992; Conner 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Both words were used in rhetorical teaching for Delivery, the former common in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the latter in late antique texts. An elegant summary of the history of this concept in the Middle Ages is Ziolkowski 2010.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Pronuntiatio igitur in voce, vultu et gestu dignam moderationem observat, ut concilietur auditor et ad fidem persuasione ducatur, ut animorum motibus incalescat’ (‘Therefore rhetorical delivery observes suitable moderation in voice, facial expression, and gesture, so that the listener may become amenable and be led to confident belief through persuasion, as he heats up through the movements of his animate spirits’) (Bene of Florence, *Candelabrum* 8.58.3; 273).

tree tells it. The emotional stages involved in such change were also well charted in medieval monastic rhetoric; Augustine described them in *De doctrina christiana*, 2.7. The emotional course of the tree's narrative mirrors these steps exactly, from its own great fear when cut down by the violent hands which dismembered it, to its steadfastness in its adversity (much emphasized in its narrative), to its increasing hope as the young warrior mounts up, to its ultimate joy at having borne the redeemer, and its apotheosis as the Cross clad in gold and gems. As a work of art, this poem is most significant not as it expresses doctrinal content—though of course it does that. It does not even seek, I think, to *represent* (in the sense of imitate) a psychological action. It is far more active than that. The poem directly *produces* in us a variously sensory, complex aesthetic experience that, through its enacted stages, occasions 'warm' belief, confidence, and joy, not only in the dreamer and the cross but in us, its readers. Identifying that experience is what I mean by making a rhetorical, not just a mimetic, analysis of this artefact. And it is to such experiences that the aesthetic lexicon I examine in these essays is directed.

Abbot Suger's account of his renovations and additions to the ancient church of St-Denis in Paris, beginning in about 1140, describes a parallel encounter between a person and a human artefact, though removed in time, distance, and language from *The Dream of the Rood*. Though Suger's brief text has often been examined, it is I think worth looking at again, for it has also often been misrepresented. The crucial sentence, involuted and amplified in a way characteristic of Suger's 12th-century Latin style, is this:

Wherefore when [*Unde cum*] sometimes from my delight in the ornament of God's house the multicoloured appearance of the gems may call me away from ordinary concerns and indeed honest meditation [*honesta meditatio*] by transferring from material things to immaterial ones may persuade [me] to focus on the diversity of the virtues of the saints I seem to see myself [*videor videre me*] to linger as though on some distant shore of the globe which may neither entirely be in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of heaven and then by anagogical practice be able to be translated God willing from this lower to that higher.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> 'Unde cum ex delectione decoris domus dei aliquando multicolor gemmarum speciositas ab exintrinsicis me curis devocaret sanctarum etiam diversitatem virtutum de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo honesta meditatio insistere persuaderet videor videre me quasi sub aliqua extranea orbis terrarum plaga quae nec tota sit in terrarum faece nec tota in coeli puritate demorari ab hac etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more deo donante posse transferri' (Abbot Suger, *De administratione* 33; my translation, consulting that of Panofsky and Panofsky-Soergel of 1979 [1946]).

I have deliberately removed all modern punctuation from the Latin in order to let the sentence's divisions become apparent from its grammar. The sentence breaks into two long clauses, the first dependent ('when . . . saints'), the second the main clause ('Wherefore . . . I seem'), *videor* being the only verb in the indicative present, all the rest being derivative forms, subjunctives and infinitives and gerunds. The dependent clause, beginning *cum*, is tucked between two chief elements of the main clause, *Unde . . . videor*, as though within a grammatical blanket, and one must delay understanding the intellectual result until one has fully perceived its cause in the sensory experience. Suger does not look up and away from his human sensation in ecstatic rapture (as has been often said). Rather he looks through its structure as though through a lens, seeing by its transferring means (*transferendo*) both conceptually and grammatically. In the Latin text, the phrase 'de materialibus . . . transferendo' serves syntactically as the 'bearer across' from his gazing upon material gemstones to his act of meditation. It is a remarkable sentence, quite as masterly in its craft as the shrine itself.

Though Suger does not overtly cite it here, the common psalm motif of loving the beauty of God's house and dwelling within in it to meditate upon the law of the Lord is evident in his language—as indeed it is a motivation for his whole renovation project. His meditation is in the common philosophical genre of *kataskopos*, the visionary 'bird's eye' look down over the earth, *orbis terrarum*. The entire action depends on the one verb, *videor*, the verb of imagination and envisioning. The artefact persuades its viewer to meditation, just as it does in *The Dream of the Rood*, through the ordinary beauty (*multicolor speciositas*) he sees in the diversity of the material gemstones decorating the shrine.<sup>46</sup> In his meditation he envisions himself gazing downwards from just above the earth, a place that is neither fully earth nor fully heaven, but caught between. The compositional method he adopted, he says, was anagogic exegesis, a common and entirely rational analytic procedure. But Suger does not report the content of his meditation, rather his focus is on the artefact which enabled it.

The causal *Unde* ('Whence') which opens this sentence refers to an action immediately preceding in his narrative. Suger gazes on the golden, gem-bedecked cross and the other altar furnishings. These call to his mind a verse from Ezekiel (28:13) which lists the gems adorning the first man's garment (*operimentum*) in Eden. This list in turn corresponds to the list of stones on Aaron's Ephod in Exodus 28:17–20, and in the walls of the

<sup>46</sup> I use the phrase 'ordinary beauty' to mean the pleasurable experience of ordinary sensations; the significance of this idea in medieval aesthetics is developed further in Chapter 6.

heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 4 and 21). In other words, the gemstones that Suger inventories are an aspect of his exegesis, not simply a boastful enumeration of abbatial bling (an obsession with gold and glitter, as his visual focus on gems has sometimes been dismissively termed). The scriptural allusion identifies Suger's project as building a new Jerusalem temple, as indeed every important church should bring to mind that divine exemplar. Every exegete had enumerated these gems' virtues in the community of saints. *Unde*, 'wherefore'...—and so the sentence recording Suger's own honest meditation occasioned by the gemstones of St Eloy's cross follows directly on. His project's goal is ratified by the narrative following this account, about the judgements of 'travelers from Jerusalem', who have assured Suger that the treasures of Saint-Denis surpass even those of the great paradigm church of Hagia Sophia.

Suger consistently praises the crafted artefact (*opus*) over its materials, however costly—his style expresses that same value. He has sometimes been criticized for his concern with precious and expensive works, both of his metalworkers and of his pen, for being too concerned with material things and insufficiently so with spiritual. But this judgement misses the point. Earlier in this same chapter 33, just before his loving description of the cross of Saint-Eloy and its associated ornaments, Suger quoted an axiom from Ovid: 'materiam superabat opus', the artefact surpassed its material (*Metamorphosis* 2.5, said of the palace of Phoebus, the Sun). Sensory experience is at the focus of all Suger describes: each ekphrasis (a figure with a long tradition in writing about church interiors and ornaments) is visualized and given both 'face' and 'voice' (by means of the inscriptions he assigned throughout), to put in motion further meditation, either personal or communal, by means of the great communal meditations of the liturgy. An artefact is not so much a cipher as a device of ingenuity.

## ART AND PERSUASION

In medieval accounts of human psychology, the working relationship of the 'sensitive soul'—the activities of sensation—and the 'intellectual soul'—acts of distinctively human understanding—is not always very clear. We may think of persuasion as one bridge between them; this is implied in the commonplace analogy of rhetoric with medicine, found in Aristotle (in the *Rhetoric*, positively) as well as Plato (in the *Gorgias*, negatively, and in *Phaedrus* more positively). It became a traditional teaching in rhetoric manuals that the orator ideally acts as a kind of physician to the body politic.

The action of rhetorical persuasion (*pithein*) results in belief based in reasoned trust (*fides*). The field of rhetoric is social and political, requiring not just factual knowledge but wise judgement. Proper oratory helps to supply the means for such judgements. Such human judgements are truthful, though they are not the same as the 'necessary' truth of mathematics, those which are everywhere and always the same. Rhetorically derived truths are 'opinions' (*doxa*, *opinionones*); they are contingent upon circumstances and particular occasions, including not only a speaker and a speech but an audience, which plays the crucial role of judging the truth of what the orator says. These judgements need to be confidently made, so belief is not entirely a matter of logical demonstration (though it certainly can include that) but also requires 'feeling confident' in one's particular decision. The result of this confidence is usually some action, whether a social decision, a legal verdict, or something more personal such as a religious belief or even a conversion. These are all matters of *fides*—*confident* belief—arrived at through a persuasive process.<sup>47</sup>

I have just described a wholly analytical type of judgement, referred to by the Greek verb *krinein*, 'to separate' and 'to analyse'. There is another kind of judgement, one pre-analytical in nature, that humans share to an extent with animals and that thus belongs to what was known to medieval schoolmen (as to ancient psychology) as the 'sensory' soul; it is referred to in the Greek verb *boûlomai*, translated in the *Greek-English Lexicon* as 'to be willing, to desire', as well as 'to consent'. Cicero gives as its Latin equivalent *voluntas*, *-are*, a translation adopted by Augustine (see, for example, *De trinitate*, 11).<sup>48</sup> It is a component of sensing, experienced as attraction (desire) or repulsion—a judgement rather like what we would call 'liking something', shared with some animals but in humans involving a kind of reasoning or at least an awareness and assessment of intention. Indeed the word for this sort of judgement in medieval scholastic psychology is *vis aestimativa*, a form of judging whether some particular thing when perceived is also beneficial or not. The standard example (taken from Aristotle) given to explain it is that *vis aestimativa* makes a lamb flee a wolf, even if it has never seen one before. This example would seem to be of what we call 'instinct', but more choice is involved than is allowed by our modern concept of inherited instincts. *Aestimatio* is more like our notion of 'gut reactions', immediate feelings of liking (or dislike).

<sup>47</sup> This paragraph summarizes the distinction between necessary syllogism and so-called 'rhetorical syllogism' or enthymeme. Both can yield truths; but the enthymeme is formally incomplete. The distinction has been discussed copiously over many centuries; a clear exposition is Burnyeat 1996.

<sup>48</sup> *Tusc. Disp.* 4.12; Cicero uses *voluntas* frequently, both in his philosophical writings and in his orations. *Intentio* is discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

All sensory data, received in the common sense, is fashioned by *phantasia* (an activity of imagination) into a coherent form, of a sort that the brain can work with. These are the 'phantasms' so called. They are images (*eikones, imagines*) of a kind, but wholly mental in their formation and in their scope of work (so to speak). However, every phantasm is not just a neutral shape but is 'coloured' as attractive or not. Every mental image is a combination of a 'likeness' (formed in the mind from the raw materials of perceptions) and some attraction. In this way, aesthetic experiences of various sorts are built into the procedures of human thinking itself. There can be no an-aesthetic thoughts, even in mathematics. In Augustine's psychology too, aesthetic experiences of all sorts always also evoke desire (or repulsion) in the perceiver. For this response, Augustine (and 12th- and 13th-century scholastics) often uses the Latin noun *intentio*, the quasi-rational, quasi-emotional 'sense' one has of whether something one is experiencing is good or harmful, 'right' or 'wrong' not in itself so much as 'for me right now'.<sup>49</sup>

An example may clarify the relationship of aesthetic experience to persuasion, this time not in the realm of words but of painting (with which rhetoric was often compared). And here the 'judges' are not human but avian. Pliny tells of a contest between the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis and a rival, Parrhasius of Ephesus. Zeuxis 'produced a picture of grapes so successfully represented that birds flew up to the stage buildings [where the painting was displayed]; whereupon Parrhasius himself produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds [*alitur iudicio tumens*], requested that the curtain should now be drawn and [Parrhasius'] picture displayed'.<sup>50</sup> Realizing that he had believed the painted curtain to be real, Zeuxis magnanimously awarded the prize to the other painter, for he had only convinced some birds, but Parrhasius had convinced him, a painter himself.

This anecdote in Pliny, and several like it, has often been adduced to demonstrate a strong taste in ancient painting for realism, naturalism, and *trompe l'œil* effect. This is surely true, but it is not the whole truth. What is stressed in the story is a judgement, *iudicium*, both by the birds and then by Zeuxis himself. By the eye-convincing evidence of the images, the birds are persuaded to believe confidently that the grapes are real and therefore fly up to eat them, and Zeuxis is similarly persuaded that a real curtain conceals a painting. That Zeuxis is puffed up (*tumens*) by his success in

<sup>49</sup> See Black 1993 and 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.36.66. Pliny recounts several similar stories: the painting of a horse by Apelles makes real horses neigh in recognition (35.36.96) and a painting of a snake frightens off real birds (35.36.121).

persuading the birds is an important detail in Pliny's story. Like any overconfident audience member, Zeuxis has misjudged an artist's skill relative to his own cleverness, and his judgement is in error. The story turns, in other words, not just on the representational skill of the painters, but on that skill *as a means of persuasion*. The painting contest is presented as a rhetorical situation, akin to orators in deliberation or debate, and demonstrates succinctly the constant active interplay, in any rhetorical occasion, of author (painter in this case), work, and audience.

## 2

# Sensory Complexion and Style

Lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce.

Dante, *Purgatorio*, 27.131

The aesthetic vocabulary of the Middle Ages derives primarily from the discourse of rhetoric. In the first instance, its terms are less assessments of states of being or of ethical worth than of sensory affect. In Roman rhetoric (often translating Greek), they are used to characterize effects of style: *dulcis*, *suavis*, *altus*, *clarus*, *acutus*, *varius*, *pulcher*, *foedus*, *asper*, *amarus*, *pinguis*, *elegans*, *subtilis*, and many more. Grammatically speaking, all were adjectives first. In other words, they articulate and qualify modes of perception by means of describing particular effects on the perceiver. They are not nouns; they are not in themselves ‘beings’. This is a fundamental logical distinction, and failure to make it will lead (and has led) to a great deal of muddle and confusion.

In the discourse of ancient (and medieval) psychology, sensations are ‘affects’ (*affectus*), which only exist as, in Aristotle’s definition, ‘a change *within the body*’, in English, a ‘sensation’. Though these effects are often called emotional, they are not emotions, strictly defined, let alone passions.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to be affected by something one perceives without arousing a distinctive emotion, though there must always be some change occurring in the perceiver—a sensation cannot be disembodied or immaterial; it cannot even be fully generalized, since by nature it is individual (though one’s companions can certainly influence one’s reactions to sensations). Some sensations are of course less strongly felt than others, and individuals always vary in their own sensory temperament. The variation and complexity that make up all our reactions to sensation are at the core of medieval aesthetic discourse and indeed practice. All

<sup>1</sup> The cautions voiced by Rosenwein 2002 and 2006, her model studies in the history of emotions, are well stated; see also the review of Rosenwein 2006 by Koziol (2008). In thinking about pre-modern ideas of emotion, particularly with regard to rhetoric and intention, the distinction made between affect and passion (*affectus/passio*) is helpful: see the introduction to Tambling 2010 and the introduction to Nagy and Boquet 2008.

sensations, like all human beings, are complexions, 'folded together' from many ingredients, not all of which are compatible or even on speaking terms, as it were. As in a good cake, the ingredients are tasted distinctly, ginger (hot), sugar (sweet), chocolate (bitter), spicing (itself a complexion), flour and butter holding the mixture together in a way that enhances without homogenizing these distinctions. And also like a good cake, the experience is complected from all the sensations: smell, sight, taste, touch (even hearing, for cakes can be decorated with music boxes). Complexion, not fusion, is the essence of the aesthetic experience.

Aristotle analysed all sensations as mixtures of contrasting qualities whose boundaries are set by the limitations of our sense organs. All natural effect is a change, movement from something to something else. The effects we perceive as sensations thus need to be analysed as intermediate ratios or proportions along a continuum between opposites. For example, we only perceive colour because colours are mixtures: 'the multiplicity of colours will be due to the fact that their components may be combined in various ratios [or proportions; the Latin translation of the Greek is *proportio*]' (*De sensu* 3; 440b20). For any two things can affect or be affected by one another, only in so far as they each have contrary qualities (*De sensu* 4; 441b15; cf. *De generatione et corruptione*, 2). This alone impels movement and allows for change, a point emphasized as well by Avicenna's commentary.<sup>2</sup> Colours are produced by different ratios of white (light) and black (dark);<sup>3</sup> flavours by mixtures of sweet and bitter in certain proportions. '[T]he tastes which give pleasure in their combinations are those which have their components joined in a definite ratio' (*De sensu*, 4; 442a15).

If voice (*phōnē*) is a concord (*sumphōnía*) [which we hear] . . . and if concord is a ratio (*logos*), hearing as well as what is heard must be a ratio (*logos*). That is why both high and low pitch [?], if excessive, destroy hearing; in the same

<sup>2</sup> 'Nothing is found pure by itself in nature, but is a composition . . . There is no pure earth, no pure fire, no pure water, but any one of them is a mixture of them all' (Avicenna, *De generatione et corruptione*, 1.52–64, my translation). Things in a pure state cannot move or change, and thus cannot affect anything else. This principle accounts for the effectiveness of drugs, as well as sensation more generally. On the medieval medical practices, especially after the late 11th century, which foregrounded this approach, see Jacquart 1998. She particularly notes the work of Ursus of Salerno, whose *De commixtionibus elementorum* explains the sensory characteristics of the natural world largely in terms of their proportional 'complexions' (Jacquart 1998: 208–9).

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle doesn't deal with pigments here; but see Gage 1993. A treatise *De coloribus* was attributed to Aristotle during the Middle Ages. In the early 13th century, Grosseteste made important correctives to previous colour theory (Smithson et al. 2012); see also the comments of Recht (1999: 228–50) on the uses of polychrome glass and paint in architectural spaces.

way in flavours excess destroys taste, and in colours the over-brilliant or over-dark destroy vision, and in smelling the strong scent . . . destroys smell: . . . the sense (*aisthēsis*) is a ratio [*logos*], and excess hurts or destroys [it].<sup>4</sup>

Aquinas comments on this passage that '*symphonia* sit [must be] *quaedam proportio*', a particular ratio of mixed sensations. Sensory delights are corrupted and overwhelmed by any excess ('superabundance') in their mixture.<sup>5</sup> Thus a pleasurable sensation is not just any mixture but one that is also 'proper', fitted to our sensory boundaries; genuine pleasures have a 'due proportion'.

Another point emphasized in the explanations of Aristotle and Aquinas, and apparent as well in the experiences described by Suger and *The Dream of the Rood*, is that an aesthetic experience is both multi-sensory and whole. It is the multiplicity and variety of sensations received in their total complexity that is pleasurable—to divide them from one another is also to lessen, perhaps destroy their delightfulness. Sights, sounds, tastes are perceived as one integral whole, as *quaedam proportio*, *quaedam* meaning both 'particular' and 'undivided'. An aesthetic experience is multimodal, each particular sense being affected by a proportioned mixture of those stimuli which it can perceive. The mind receives these together in what was called the *sensus communis* or 'common sense', and fashions them into a mental construct from which concepts and memories can be made. So the result is a pleasure that is simultaneously multiplex and yet has integrity.

Aquinas continues:

For if many sensations are perceived as a rational mixture, they are made pleasurable; just so in tastes, when a thing is according to due proportion [*secundum debitam proportionem*] either sharp or sweet or salty; then indeed things are entirely pleasing, and all that is mixed is more pleasing than what is single: so a concord is [composed] as much of a high voice as a low . . . But excess destroys or at least diminishes a sensation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *De anima*, 3.2; 426b.

<sup>5</sup> '*Symphonia*, id est vox consonans et proportionata, sit vox *quaedam*, et vox quodammodo sit idem quod auditus, et *symphonia* sit *quaedam proportio*, necesse est quod auditus sit *quaedam proportio*. Et quia quaelibet proportio corrumpitur per superabundantiam, ideo excellens sensibile corrumpit sensum, sicut quod est excellenter grave et acutum corrumpit auditum' ('Since *symphonia*, that is a sound concurring and proportionate, must be a particular sound, and the sound must be the same as what is heard, and *symphonia* is a particular ratio, it follows that what is heard is a particular ratio. And since any ratio is destroyed by excess, so too much of a sensation overwhelms the sense, as what is much too low or high overwhelms hearing') (Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia 'De anima'*, 3, lectio 2, n. 14).

<sup>6</sup> 'Sed si plura sensibilia deducuntur ad proportionatam misionem, efficiuntur delectabilia: sicut in saporibus, quando aliquid secundum debitam proportionem est aut acutum, aut dulce, aut salum; tunc enim sunt omnino delectabilia. Et omne, quod est mistum, est

Pleasure results from mixtures: 'all that is mixed is more pleasing than what is single'. What is most pleasing is ratios of multiplex and indeed multiform sensations of taste, touch, smell, sight, sound. Frequently these cross what we take to be sensory borders, and we are surprised by what seems to us their 'synaesthesia'. But medieval aesthetic is not much pleased by simples and 'purities', or by artefacts that address only one sense at a time. This is a medieval principle that is often at odds with a modern western sensibility that favours 'pure' forms and ascetic simplicity. Many modern tourists, pleased by the simple lines and bare sculpted forms of medieval churches, are dismayed to discover that these were often painted in many bright colours, gilded, and of course lighter than they seem now, when so much of their original stonework and glass, coloured or grisaille, has dimmed over time, and so many of their interior statues and ornaments are lost.

It is always said, correctly, that medieval aesthetic is incarnational and Incarnational. There is no doubt that that particular Christian doctrine was used to justify human arts, as we will see again in Chapter 6. But the dogma did not *cause* medieval arts to cultivate multisensory, cross-modal expression and strongly opposing formal values within a work. These principles are not just an expression of theology or of moral values. Like the rhetorical art upon which it is modelled, their aesthetic is social, interactive, and (as some of us now say) performative. It seeks to persuade those it pleases to believe with confidence and trust. None of this involves particular content or dogma, or even language, at this first stage of sensory perception. To summarize, aesthetic experience belongs to the 'sensitive' activities of the soul: understanding is based in these but comes later in the process. This sequence needs to be recognized and respected.

## INTENTION, PLEASURE, AND DESIRE

Among the most remarkable of Dante's creations in the *Commedia* are the 'shades', *ombre*, who accompany him and with whom he interacts constantly throughout both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. These, we learn, are pure 'intentions', neither physical body nor intellectual spirit. How they behave reveals a good deal about the psychologically and ethically important though difficult medieval notion of *intentio*. Having been horrified, pained, disgusted by and contemptuous of the shades in *Inferno*, he sees

magis delectabile, quam quod est simplex; sicut symphonia, quam vox acuta tantum, vel gravis tantum . . . Sed excellentia corrumpit sensum, vel saltem contristat ipsum' (Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia 'De anima'*, 3, lectio 2, n. 15).

with relief a group of much happier beings when he and Virgil enter Purgatory:

Io vidi una di lor trarresi avanti  
per abbracciarmi, con sí grande affeto  
che mosse me a far lo somigliante.  
Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto!  
tre volte dietro a lei le mani avvinsi,  
e tante mi tornai con esse al petto.  
Di maraviglia, credo, mi dipinsi;  
per che l'ombra sorrise e si ritrasse,  
e io, seguendo lei, oltre mi pinsi.

(Dante, *Purgatorio*, 2.76–84)<sup>7</sup>

(I saw one of them draw forwards to embrace me, with affection so great that it moved me to do the same. Oh insubstantial shades, except in appearance! three times I clasped my hands behind that shade, and as many times I drew them back to my breast. Wonder, I think, was painted on my face, at which the shade smiled and drew back, and I following it, pushed forward.)

We are first introduced to their surprising inconsistency when the pilgrim, welcomed unexpectedly by his musical friend Casella who steps forwards in delight, seeks to express his own pleasure with an embrace, and finds himself clasping only his own body. Wonderment painted me, the pilgrim says, at which the shade smiled and then drew back while I, following, pushed myself forwards (*seguendo lei, oltre mi pinsi*). Though Dante's wonder has received the bulk of commentary on this scene, I want rather to stress the sequence of movements in 2.76–84: recognition, delight, desire, and forward movement from Casella with an answering recognition, delight, desire, and forward movement by the pilgrim. It is pleasure that drives this little scene, motivating it psychologically and also physically.

Dante's ethical experiences of *Purgatorio* begin as moments of aesthetic pleasure, delight that motivates desire. That natural motion forward, towards what delights, is the key element in purgation. It reminds me—in a very Dantean way—of Dylan Thomas's 'force that through the green fuse drives the flower', only the life-force for Dante is specifically an individual's desire for pleasure. This is not a new interpretation—far from it—but I want to emphasize the aesthetic basis of Dante's notion, partly because I think it helps explain why *Purgatorio* is so full of artists,

<sup>7</sup> On this encounter and Dante's concept of 'shades' throughout the *Commedia*, see Gragnolati 2007a and 2007b. On the ever problematic notion, especially in Augustinian thought, of the 'longing' of souls for their bodies, see also Bynum 1995: *passim*, but esp. 240–71.

right from this first encounter with Casella—music and musicians, painters, poets ancient and new. Even the princes are singing.

In the account of human psychology which Augustine gives in book 11 of *De trinitate*, one of his works most consistently known throughout the Middle Ages, human thought never becomes fully abstracted from worldly experience; it cannot leave behind its memory images and its desiring appetite. For ‘the limits of our thinking are set by memory, just as the limits of our sensations are set by our bodies’ (*De trin.* 11.8.14). Suppose, Augustine says, someone tells me about a mountain that has been deforested and planted instead with olives: I understand him because I recall what a mountain, and forest, and olive trees look like—if I had no experience of such things I could not conceive what I was being told. If someone talks to me about Jerusalem or his brother David, a city or a person I have never seen, I at least know what a city is and what a brother is, and so can conceive what he is saying. My experiences of these things are in my memory: to understand what I am being told in this instance, my desire to comprehend calls them up to my mind. If I am asked to think about something that does not actually exist, I can readily do so. No one has ever really seen a black swan (*cygnus niger*). But one can picture the bird, because one knows what a swan is and what black is, and so the thought-image is easily made. By combining (or separating) our knowledge in this way, we construct thoughts of things we in fact have not experienced, by taking materials from our memories which we call up variously in as many ways as we wish. An informed will is properly called *arbitrium*, a judging capability, as Augustine defined it elsewhere (though he doesn’t use the term here in book 11 of *De trinitate*). But notice that such concepts as ‘city’, ‘brother’, ‘black’ are conceived by Augustine to be experienced in our minds as likenesses desired and chosen for thinking; they are neither neutral nor fully abstract. This is an easy point to overlook, but it is crucial. Some sort of re-collecting of prior sensory experiences is going on in all human thought, even thoughts of God. Furthermore, mental phantasms, in and of themselves, cannot be distinguished as externally or internally derived, real or imagined—once sensations become phantasms they are all imagined.

Intellection, the ability to make ideas and to understand, begins with retrieving aspects of memories previously stored, but these are chosen and ‘expressed’ (he uses the verb *exprimere*, ‘pressed out’) and then selectively gathered into a separate, new phantasm. Augustine says that in this activity recollection, reason, and will together create a kind of superior thought-image, one assembled with ever more deliberate intention and intellectually informed choice. As *voluntas reminiscendi*, ‘desire of recollecting’, our *voluntas* now can be a composer, fashioning the unfamiliar and

unknown into something comprehensible to our intellect. Because of this ability, humans are able to understand matters beyond the reach of their own experiences, and even to think about wholly abstract ideas that they cannot actually picture, such as infinity and eternity.

*Voluntas*, in Augustine, is always desire, more like appetite than intellect, thus an activity humans share with all other living creatures, all things that grow and eat and reproduce. Our desires are of our bodies to a degree that even the phantasms made in the sensitive soul are not. (This is where I most part company with a rigorously neoplatonist interpretation of Augustine.) Because they involve desire, our thought-objects are formed not only with likeness to an external object but also have particular *intentio*, the impression not only of the objects we perceive but of the delight and desire with which we attended to them in the first place. Intention is 'movement towards'; the very word, as Aquinas also noted, means 'to aim at something' (*ST* I-II, Q.12, a.1). Notice this is not described as a hierarchical, vertical motion of repression or sublimation, but a movement *outwards*, towards what is desired. Notice also that Aquinas, in discussing *intentio* (*ST* I-II, Q.12), follows Augustine in *De trinitate* 11 explicitly, and not Aristotle—this choice of authority on his part should be noted.

All human sensory perceptions and experiences involve directed desires, our intentions. These are natural movements, not thought of as psychological states so much as energies tending toward some objective. In Augustine's analysis, *intentio* is the key to knowing. No simple causal relationship exists between an object and our perception of it: instead any complete act of perception requires a triad of agents, the object, our senses, and our will.<sup>8</sup> What we know from our sensory world is in the form of beliefs and opinions. Aesthetic experiences are not a one-way traffic of data received transparently from a passive object by a sense, and then directly transmitted as some sort of neurological formation. They are at least two-way, because we choose to know what we are perceiving—we must notice what our senses are taking in. Such paying attention is *intentio*, a 'movement' of our desire; something in the streams of sensory data we receive catches our

<sup>8</sup> A good introduction to the nature and role of *voluntas* in Augustine's ethics, its ancient sources, and how it later developed is Kahn 1988, which, following Dihle 1982, stresses that Augustine's notion of an individual's 'divided will', one of the chief innovations of his ethical theory, owes a great deal to Pauline and Hebrew traditions in the Bible, as well as to late antique philosophy. As Kahn emphasizes, *voluntas* translated Greek *boûlomai*, 'prefer' and also 'consent', identified by Aristotle as a kind of 'deliberation' that humans share with certain animals, such as spiders and bees (*De memoria*, 453a). The concept always had its strongest associations with 'desire' and 'wish', as is apparent in its Latin translation; see Liddell & Scott, s.v. *βοῦλομαι*. See also Dihle 1982 on influences other than Greek; and Colish 1990.

notice and we desire to pay it attention. That this is so, he says disarmingly, can be demonstrated in many ways, including the common experience of looking through a page or a tablet, yet not being able to remember anything of what one just read—this, he says, happens to me often. Or listening to a friend's conversation but not taking in what they say because we are thinking about something else. Without our willingness to pay attention, we do not construct an experience, even though our ears and eyes are receiving data. *Intentio animi* (Augustine's phrase) links the external world to our psyche: it is the agent that holds (*tenet*) and connects (*coniungit*) us intellectually to our world. *Intentio* is also, as Augustine defines it, the force of 'appetite', expressing in this case its desire to perceive some particular thing. Those who become blind, he observes, do not lose their desire to see because their eyes have failed, though such desire is, in their condition, an unreasonable one.

Because they result from desire, our thought-objects are formed not only with likeness to an external object but also have particular *intentio*, the impression not only of the objects we perceive but of the delight and desire with which we attended to them in the first place. Augustine lays great emphasis on the forceful motion of desire. It is so powerful that it can direct the body, even against its knowledge and better judgement. Augustine recounts a friend telling him that vividly imagined sex caused him actually to ejaculate. Vivid dreams and daydreams, which are all made from images called up from memory, can cause delusions and even madness, as the will, through such images, is 'stretched' (*intenditur*) towards what it desires. Strong desires—Augustine calls them *intentiones*—even affect the bodies of more susceptible creatures, like 'the little body of a chameleon' ('*corpusculum chamaeleontis*': 11.2.5) which changes colours as it desires or fears something it has perceived. And, Augustine notes, desires even affect animal foetuses. This is why Jacob was able to ensure that the pregnant ewes who saw his parti-coloured stakes set up by the water trough, just where their thirst made their desire most eager, would bear parti-coloured lambs to increase his stock (Gen. 30:37).

The ability of mind to affect a physical body was a much discussed matter throughout the medieval centuries. It was usually concluded that it does so by way of mental images causing bodily movements. For example, Albertus Magnus treats the question, citing Avicenna as his main source. Imagination or *phantasia* is 'a bodily motion caused by the action of a sense-organ'. This action cannot distinguish between external and internal stimuli. If one dreams of a woman, one's body may well respond just as if she were really present; if one dreams one has become leprous one can

awaken as a leper. He has more to say about this curious idea in his treatise *De animalibus*. Again citing Avicenna, he comments, 'someone imagining red colors increases the movement and flux of [his] blood: and someone greatly fearing and anxious about leprosy sometimes becomes leprous: and many other imagined things have effects in human beings in this way'.<sup>9</sup> It is a very old observation in natural philosophy that animals also make mental images, which cause them to behave as if a fantasy were real: horses shy at shadows, cats see ghosts, dogs run in their dreams. These are common examples. But medieval psychology attributed greater power than most people now do to such sensation-derived phantasms as biological forces in the body—they not only can cause sexual responses, they can shape foetuses and cause diseases.<sup>10</sup> The images' intentions, in other words, continue to be able to 'intend' us as well, to affect us as the shades do the living Dante.

## THE INTENTION OF THE WORK

*Intentio* was also a quality possessed by an artefact, a context in which the concept retained its fundamental directional model. The standard medieval *Accessus ad auctores*, the commentary on canonical texts (including the Psalms), recognized a category called 'intentio auctoris'. *Intentio auctoris* is the overall direction of the work, how it moves and moves us, which is articulated through the variations of its formal *ductus*, both stylistic and conceptual (*ductus* meaning 'guides' and 'paths'). 'Intention' is conceived to be within the work itself—the artifact considered as an agent, motivator, and guide through those stylistic and formal means that, because they draw on conventions and shared traditions, have considerable agency separate from the human, historical author. *Intentio auctoris*—in this sense—is a useful concept for studying medieval arts, though one seemingly lost to modern criticism, for it has been entirely subsumed into the personality of the artisan, as though this had been directly and transparently transferred into the artefact. I have written extensively elsewhere about the medieval understanding of the terms *intentio auctoris* and *ductus*, so I will just summarize here what I have said:

<sup>9</sup> '[Q]uod ymaginans colores rubeos auget sanguinis motum et fluxum: et multum tristis et timens lepram aliquando leprosus: et cetera multa in homine contingunt huiusmodi' (Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, 22.1.4).

<sup>10</sup> See van der Eijk 2000 and Sorabji 2000.

The concept that an artistic work is a journey (while certainly to be found in ancient rhetoric) achieves a particular importance—even ubiquity—in medieval analysis. One is said to travel through a composition, whether of words or other materials, led on by the stylistic qualities of its parts and their formally arranged relationships. *Ductus* and its synonyms analyse the experience of artistic form as an on-going, dynamic process rather than as the examination of a static or completed object. *Ductus* is the way by which a work leads someone through itself: that quality in a work's stylistic patterns which engages an audience and then sets a viewer or auditor or performer in motion within its guiding structures and articulating colours, an experience more like travelling through stages along a route than like perceiving a whole object. (Carruthers 2010a: 190)<sup>11</sup>

The theory of rhetorical *ductus* was articulated most fully by the 4th-century rhetoric master, Consultus Fortunatianus, and by the 5th-century Martianus Capella, whose poem on the liberal arts quotes Fortunatianus (and whose work was far better known directly throughout the Middle Ages). The roots of the theory, though, are in Quintilian and indeed Cicero: the idea that, in Bene of Florence's formulation, engaged audiences are 'led to' confident belief through the persuasive means within the orator's speech.<sup>12</sup> (That idea is fundamental in all rhetoric.)

*Ductus* models an artefact as *iter*, a journey, with an overall intention or *tenor* towards its end, and a variety of smaller movements, termed 'modes' and 'colours', that act as guides and channels for audiences, both through the different stages of the way and (perhaps after delightful delays) towards the journey's ultimate destination. In the traditional terms of rhetoric, tenor and colours are the 'arrangement' and 'stylistic clothing' (*venustas*) of a work, just those aspects of it to which someone experiencing it has direct sensory access. Its arrangement of arguments (always remembering that in rhetoric 'arguments' included exemplary stories, maxims, and commonplaces, not only formulaic principles) but above all its styles gave to any work agency of its own, ability to intend and thus affect those intently experiencing it. In some ways, medieval aesthetics is all about bending *towards* what is delightful and away *from* what is painful and fearful. But of course one must in the first place intend to 'pay attention', an action not unlike the critical first movement of any speech, *captatio benevolentiae*, the 'capture' of the audience's 'good desiring'.

<sup>11</sup> On the medieval understanding of this idea, and its related model of a composition as a journey, see Carruthers 2010a. The idea of rhetorical *ductus* has been studied, for late antiquity, by Calboli Montefusco (2003), and for some of the early modern period by Cox (2003).

<sup>12</sup> 'Ad fidem persuasione ducatur' (Bene of Florence, *Candelabrum*, 8.58.3; 273).

## THE DELIGHT OF ANTITHESIS: AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Shall you not then shun those rows of Christ's enemies [in the theatre], that seat of all that is pestilential, and the very air which hangs over it accursed with the cries of sinners? I grant that there may be things that are pleasing, agreeable and innocent, even some that are worthy [*honestas*]. Nobody tempers poison with gall and hellebore, but with savoury condiments and things well seasoned: most often one introduces the hurtful venom in sweets [*id mali* refers to *venenum*]. So, too, the devil imbues the lethal [poison] which he prepares with things of God most pleasant and most acceptable. In that place, hold everything that is brave or virtuous, sonorous, tuneful, or exquisitely crafted [to be] but as droplets of honey from a poisoned pastry; nor should you make as much of your taste for its pleasure as of the danger from its attraction.<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian's famous invective *Against Public Spectacles*, hyperbolic as it is, presents a telling instance of a common late antique Stoic reaction to a notion, usually identified as Epicurean, of 'honest pleasures' (an idea we will examine further in Chapter 5). Just as medicines can both heal and poison, so can delight.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing unusual in that idea, at least in ancient and medieval thought, though one may well ask why the word *honestas* keeps company in this passage with *dulcis*. In this part of *De spectaculis*, Tertullian is inveighing against gladiators' combat in amphitheatres, a common part of Roman celebrations held to honour the gods and the state—clear idolatry, in Tertullian's estimation. But not without pleasure (*dulcedo, suavitas*) and worth (*honestas*).

Tertullian's biblical text is 'nemo enim potest duobus dominis servire': no one can serve two masters. Not tolerant of ambiguity, Tertullian set himself wholly against the pagan world, as he saw it. The pleasures of heaven have nothing at all to do with those of the world—his is an unforgiving puritanism (unlike the tortured ambiguity two centuries later of his fellow Carthaginian, Augustine of Hippo—Tertullian died in

<sup>13</sup> 'Non ergo fugies sedilia hostium Christi, illam cathedram pestilentiarum ipsumque aerem qui desuper incubat scelestis vocibus consturpatum? sint dulcia licet et grata et simplicia, etiam honesta quaedam. nemo venenum temperat felle et elleboro, sed conditis pulmentis et bene saporatis, et plurimum dulcibus id mali inicit. ita et diabolus letale quod conficit rebus dei gratissimis et acceptissimis imbuat. [5] omnia illic seu fortia seu honesta seu sonora seu canora seu subtilia perinde habe ac stillicidia mellis de lucunculo venenato nec tanti gulam facias voluptatis quanti periculum per suavitatem' (Tertullian, *De spectaculis*, 27.4–5).

<sup>14</sup> On the medical effects of literary and other intellectual pleasure, see Olson 1982: 39–89.

230, Augustine in 430). And yet in this passage he concedes (*licebit*) some measure of *honestas* (inherent worth) as well as bravery (*fortitudo*) to the work of the gladiators, and real delight in the music and the well-made artefacts of the amphitheatre. These are still 'res Dei', things of God, though the devil has poisoned them irremediably. Tertullian is masterfully using the style called Grand, *magniloquens*, proper to subjects of utmost worthiness (*honestas*). And in so far as it succeeds in persuading, it is, for that reason, *suavis* and *dulcis*. So a poisoned honeycake is *dulcis* both literally, as a cake, and stylistically, as a vivid metaphor. While vigorously rejecting everything about pagan values, he simultaneously calls upon some of those same values to persuade his audiences. Even Tertullian's world isn't quite as clear-cut as it often seems. The world is mixed and in flux, pleasure with harm, sweetness with peril.

Like many late antique moral philosophers, Augustine distinguishes regularly between licit and illicit pleasures. Like most, he also assumes and indeed argues that the distinction lies in our rational judgements of the pleasure and what we do because of it, rather than being distinguishable by some qualitative differences in the pleasurable sensation itself. Upon reflection, this observation would seem to be obvious, yet it is a point often not made by later moralists determined to set up a check-box system of allowable and disallowed pleasures. Augustine's ethical sensibility—rather like that of his revered Cicero—is not so simple-minded nor so monotonous. In the first book of *De doctrina christiana*, he distinguishes 'greater' and 'lesser' good, language more usual in ancient moral philosophy, perhaps, than is the adjective *licitus*. But it seems to me that no radical change from Ciceronian or Senecan ethics is introduced by Augustine's use of *licitus* to distinguish among his pleasures. Central to judging what is 'licit' is realizing that the application of 'justice' involves a negotiation of general and particular, the difficult measuring of law and equity with respect to particular cases.<sup>15</sup>

Pleasure is just that, a sensation. The Stoic idea of 'first motions', widely known in the Latin world through the writings of Seneca, is essential in early Christian morality and well developed in later moral theology, for example, in the pastoral commonplace of 'consenting to sin' (Sorabji 2000: 66–75).<sup>16</sup> First sensations are involuntary, purely appetitive: then comes assessment and moral judgement. The monastic drama of diabolical temptation envisions this process as hard mental wrestling which

<sup>15</sup> Discussed fruitfully by Eden 1986.

<sup>16</sup> See also Colish 1990 on Augustine and Stoic ethics, and P. Brown 1988: 387–427, on Augustinian will and 'consent'. See also Rabbow 1954, especially on the influence of such ideas in desert monastic practices.

develops heroic virtue, just as physical wrestling develops superior strength and agility—indeed the same Greek verb is used, *meletein*. It is basic to the psychic contest, as Augustine describes it in a sermon on justice, that the initial aesthetic effect *not* be perceptibly moral or just, in and of itself. The uncertainty and ambivalence of the effect produces one's doubt and struggle; without that there is no drama. Nor can there be an exercise of judgement nor a test of will, only an identification (like learning to tell a rose from a daisy).

'Justified' pleasure is assessed by individual ethical judgements guided by the virtues (traditional in Ciceronian rhetorical teaching) of justice, moderation, courage, and prudence, also called *phronesis* and *sapientia* and 'practical wisdom'.<sup>17</sup> These virtues are particularly praised in a citizen orator and statesman, cultivated through his training and practice in analysis and equitable judgement, enriched through his entire education. Augustine discusses 'justice' in his sermon on Romans 8:30, a text about predestination and 'justification' in that very particular Hebrew sense of being 'elected' by God.<sup>18</sup> The Graeco-Roman legal concept of 'justification', and this concept of being 'elect' would seem to be very different. Yet Augustine is addressing an audience he assumed had all acquired the rhetorical education he had himself. So he begins to explore *justitia* with reference to sensory delights in a more Roman way, associated with 'equity', 'measure', and 'right'. A notion of balance is central to the Roman virtue of *justitia*. Augustine also makes it central to his prose rhythm in this passage.

A happy life, Augustine says, requires a 'love of justice'. Yet, he wonders, how can one be said to 'love' something so abstract? Love is pleasure, and how can 'justice' be pleasurable?

The 'love of justice' has certain stages. The first stage: Pleasures of the senses are justifiable [*licitae*] and not justifiable [*illicitae*]... What is it that I have said? That of all the things which are pleasing, justice [*justicia*] itself should

<sup>17</sup> An excellent presentation of what is now called virtue-based ethics (of the ancient and medieval sort), arguing for it in the context of a post-Kantian rule-based ethics now more common, is Annas 2011.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek word used in Rom. 8:30 is *dikaïos*, 'judge' and 'judgement', as in a court. Aristotle comments that 'To go to a judge [*ton dikastên*] is to go to justice, for the ideal judge is so to speak justice personified [*dikaion empsuchon*]' (NE 5.4.7). The origin of the word *dikaion* ('just'), he says, lies in the word for 'half', *dicha*. 'Justice is a mode of observing the mean', and as a virtue, it is the quality by which 'a man is said to be disposed to do by deliberate choice that which is just' and to distribute goods between himself and others on a principle of proportionate (not just identical) equality (NE 5.5.17). Injustice is at the extremes, 'excess and defect' of goods. The Greek idea is quite different from the biblical idea of being 'chosen' by God. Unsurprisingly, this verse in Romans has been the subject of much controversy and diverse commentary over many centuries.

please you more; not that the other things are not pleasing but that this one pleases more. Indeed certain things naturally please our human fragility, as food and drink please those eating and drinking; as that light pleases us which is poured from the sky by the dawning sun, or which gleams from the stars and moon, or which is kindled on earth in lights consoling the darkness of our eyes: a melodious voice is pleasing and sweetest song, a good smell is pleasing; whatever things pertain to any of our body's desire also please our touch. And all these things, which please us in the senses of our body are in some way in accord with justice. These great spectacles of nature, as I said, please our eyes, but theatrical spectacles also please our eyes. These [are] justified, the others not [*Haec licita, illa illicita*]. A sacred psalm sweetly sung pleases the hearing; but the songs of music-hall actors also please the hearing. This [is] justified, that not. Flowers and aromas please our sense of smell and these are God's creations; the incense on the altars of pagan gods also please our sense of smell. These justified, those not. Food that is not prohibited by religious law pleases our taste; also pleasing are the banquets of sacrilegious sacrifices. The one justified, the other not. Conjugal embraces are pleasing; so are those of whores. These justified, those not. You see therefore, my dear friends, that in the senses of each person's body are justified and unjustified pleasures. Justice therefore may delight [us], as it proves delights justified; and in that pleasure in which you delight justifiably, set justice first. (Augustine, *Sermones*, 159.2; PL 38.868, on Romans 8:30–1)<sup>19</sup>

I have translated Latin *licit-* as 'justified' in order to free the word from its associations simply with moral prohibitions, and realign it with notions of rightness as equilibrium and proportion that accord better with the Latin Augustine knew, in which *voluntas* primarily meant 'desire', as he argues in book 11 of *De trinitate*. *Voluntas* straddles appetite, longing, and choice

<sup>19</sup> 'Justitiae amor admittit aliquot gradus. Primus gradus. Delectationes sensuum licitae et illicitae... Quid est quod dixi? Ut inter omnia quae delectant, plus te delectet ipsa justitia; non ut alia non delectent, sed plus ipsa delectet. Delectant enim quaedam naturaliter infirmitatem nostram, ut cibus et potus delectant esurientes atque sitientes; ut nos delectat haec lux, quae de coelo funditur sole exorto, vel quae de sideribus et luna fulget, vel quae in terra accenditur luminibus consolantibus tenebras oculorum: delectat canora vox et suavissima cantilena, delectat odor bonus; delectant etiam tactum nostrum quaecumque pertinent ad carnis aliquam voluptatem. Et haec omnia, quae nos delectant in sensibus corporis, aliqua licita sunt. Delectant enim, ut dixi, oculos spectacula ista magna naturae: sed delectant oculos etiam spectacula theatrorum. Haec licita, illa illicita. Psalmus sacer suaviter cantatus delectat auditum: sed delectant auditum etiam cantica histrionum. Hoc licite, illud illicite. Delectant olfactum flores et aromata, et haec Dei creatura: delectant olfactum etiam thura in aris daemioniorum. Hoc licite, illud illicite. Delectat gustum cibus non prohibitus; delectant gustum etiam epulae sacrilegorum sacrificiorum. Hoc licite, illud illicite. Delectant conjugales amplexus: delectant etiam meretricum. Hoc licite, illud illicite. Videtis ergo, charissimi, esse in istis corporis sensibus licitas et illicitas delectationes. Justitia sic delectet, ut vincat etiam licitas delectationes; et ei delectationi qua licite delectaris, praepone justitiam.' On the idea of 'grades' of pleasures, see Cicero *De finibus*, 2, a dialogue that seems pertinent to this sermon of Augustine.

as it straddles emotion and reason, a linguistic situation which Augustine frequently exploits for its complexity.<sup>20</sup> The condition of being 'licit', in ancient ethics, easily tips over into excess, at which point what is licit becomes illicit. One sees this readily in the double meaning of the classical noun *licentia*, meaning both 'freedom' and its abuse, 'dissoluteness', a doubleness preserved in the English noun 'licence', a 'freedom' which can become 'licentious'. This inherent tension becomes a refrain for the whole passage: 'hoc licite, illud illicite'.

And the measurable tension of the syllables in that refrain—*hoc licite, illud illicite*—applied to specific different situations involving pleasures of each of the five senses, conveys Augustine's meaning to a degree that neither abstract paraphrase nor formulaic rule could do. Without saying so directly, he has invoked *by means of style alone* a powerful notion of justice in antiquity, not as sets of prohibitions, but as balance and equity, 'just measure'.<sup>21</sup> The second phrase (*illud illicite*), by adding an extra immensurate syllable, upsets the measured justness of the first phrase enough to tip into 'excess'. One can indeed detect this directly by ear. One does not need to know the rules of Latin metres, though metrics measures the 'licit' and 'illicit', not as 'predestined' but as 'balance' and 'equivalence'. In effect, Augustine has adjudicated the Pauline difficulty for his Roman audience by means of style (his masterful use of prose *cursus*). This is an instance, I think, of how style can be said truthfully to have its own agency, affecting how we hear and conceive something aesthetically, through our ears in this case, not just some paraphrased 'content' we glean from the words. And Augustine takes advantage of this aesthetic experience to convey a dimension to his teaching that he does not (and

<sup>20</sup> Dihle 1982: 137–44 relates Augustinian 'voluntarism' both to the characterization of God in the Bible and to a meaning developed in Roman legal practice, familiar to Augustine from rhetoric, in which *voluntas* is the 'intention' behind the written words of a law or a testament (for example), a 'hermeneutical' concept which 'signified mere volition, regardless of its originating from either cognition or emotion' (142). Dihle notes: '*Voluntas* had already been used to render the Greek words which denote the will of God in Greek theology of the third and fourth centuries' (143). For Augustine, God's *voluntas* cannot be parsed by human reason in the Bible as in theology. Sorabji (2000: 303–40) stresses instead how classical philosophy had many different ideas of 'will' compatible with its much greater intellectualism.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle (*NE* 5.3 and 5.4) emphasizes that ethical 'equality' is not a matter simply of reciprocity but involves much weighing and balancing (equity) to achieve 'right measure' in particular cases. In Moerbeke's translation of *NE* 5.3.14, 'Iustum quidem igitur hoc porporcionale. Iniustum autem quod preter porporcionale.' The idea is also implicit in Cicero's maxim: 'Iustitia est habitus animi communi utilitate conservata suam cuique tribuens dignitatem' ('Justice is a habit of mind which, while preserving the common good, distributes to each person his merit') (*De invent.* 2.53.160).

perhaps cannot) define properly for his audience but rather inscribes sonically in their intent ears.

Very often it is the case with pre-modern aesthetic concepts that they embody not a single feeling but are situated between poles of opposite feelings, in a precarious balance easily upset, but one that also provides the energy and force of the sensation as experienced. An underlying precariousness drives the opposing clauses of Augustine's description of sensuous pleasures in this sermon. It is characteristic of his oratorical style; and indeed he deemed *antithesis*—the tensed balance of articulated opposites, such as those in these Latin clauses—to be one of the most pleasing as well as most powerful of verbal graces. It produces not the balance of stasis and rest but the balance of a tight-rope walker or a dancer. Being able to hold that balance is a genuine pleasure, power exercised between delight and fear.

At the top of Purgatory, Dante is able, after having his soul straightened and made *dritto*, to take his *pleasure* for his guide: 'lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce' (*Purgatorio*, 27, 131). Augustine's standard of *licitus* as applied to judging aesthetic pleasures is derived from Senecan Stoicism as much as from rhetoric, since Stoic ethics had influenced such masters of rhetoric as Cicero and especially Quintilian.<sup>22</sup> An individual needed to develop an internalized sense of 'rightness', *rectus*, in ethical judgements. This concept is evident in Dante's term, 'dritto'; his will, straightened by the mountain (*Purgatorio*, 23.125–6), has become 'libero, dritto, sano' (*Purgatorio*, 27.141).<sup>23</sup>

In a letter that became famous throughout the Middle Ages, Seneca refers to ethical virtue as 'habitus animi rectus', a straight habit of mind.<sup>24</sup> He uses the phrase *habitus animi* or *habitus mentis* often, in discussing

<sup>22</sup> See Eden 1986.

<sup>23</sup> Compare also *Purgatorio*, 16.86–90, Marco Lombardo speaking to Dante about *l'anima semplicetta*, 'the little simple soul', which comes forth from its Maker as playful as a baby (*pargoleggia*). It knows nothing but turns in desire (*volentier torna*) to what delights it. That 'turning' to what pleases it is the basis of its education, achieved through guiding this natural movement, rather like training a seedling or a puppy. The idea is not unlike the idea of a child as *tabula rasa*, except it emphasizes motive and natural change. In his commentary on the First Epistle of John (*Tractates on the Epistle of John*, tract. 7.8; PL 35.2033), Augustine comments that when a soul loves God fully it can do as it pleases: 'Dilige et quid vis fac' ('Love and do what you will') (see Dihle 1982: 130–1). Dante's idea here is correctly attributed (since the earliest commentaries) to teaching in Aquinas that emphasizes the primacy of reason in controlling desire, but this Augustinian maxim also seems implicit.

<sup>24</sup> Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 94, to Lucilius; cf. *De ira*, 1.5; and also Cicero, *De invent.* 2.53.159, where all virtue, not only justice, is defined as 'animi habitus naturae modo atque rationi consentaneus' ('habit of mind consonant with the manner of nature and reason'). On theological understanding of ethical *habitus* during the 12th century, see Nederman 1989 and Colish 1993.

virtue; it is a Stoic idea, with roots in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. By Seneca's time, Latin had developed a complex range of meanings for *habitus*, including 'clothing', 'place lived', 'custom' as well as its association with virtue. Training and learning in an accustomed place is essential to acquiring rightly justified habits, and there is a strong sense also that applying external guides, as from familiar architecture and clothing, can aid this process. Not for nothing did monasticism—whether Christian, Jewish, or philosophical—pay great attention to place, disciplined exercise, and clothing.

The idea of *habitus* is related to that informing *intentio*, and is also thought of directionally: a habit channels one towards certain sorts of choices, judgements, beliefs. Indeed, throughout *Commedia* the movements possible to pilgrim and reader alike within its three parts are sharply distinguished one from another. In *Inferno* we must circle down following the treacherous topography of the pit; in *Purgatorio* we climb doggedly up, following the mountain's rugged structure; in *Paradiso* we move mysteriously in a succession of leaps, 'beamed up' along with the pilgrim by Beatrice's eyes. These motions all together create the *intentio* of this work; the poem guides us through itself with greater assurance than Virgil at times can lead Dante. No other medieval work exploited quite so fully the aesthetic principles of stylistic agency in the standard model of *iter*, *ductus*, and *color*, the idea that style itself directly changes human bodies simply because our sensations affect us.

## MORALS, PLEASURE, AND THE GAMES OF OBSCURITY

Traditionally in rhetoric, the source of aesthetic pleasure is style, *suavis* and *dulcis* being the two adjectives that usually signal it (though as we will later see, many others are also used, including effects that appear contradictory). This seems obvious. Yet the point is often lost or overlooked, perhaps just because it is familiar and basic. Style does not just 'imitate' pleasure, or 'express' the pleasure of something else—it directly causes delight. This was recognized throughout the Middle Ages, indeed as one historian has noted (and he is hardly the first or only one to do so), 'in spite of many pronouncements in favor of stylistic clarity and humility, in practice medieval readers and writers found many reasons to put a premium upon obscurity. Theirs was often an aesthetic that favored difficulty, complicated ornament, artificiality, amplification, and periphrasis' (Ziolkowski 1996: 138).

An instructive example of this is in Augustine's meditation about reading the notably obscure, puzzling text of the Song of Songs, particularly 6:5, about the Bride: 'thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing.'<sup>25</sup> What is being described, Augustine notes, is a lovely woman, whose teeth are as beautiful as the rest of her—why isn't her description straightforward, in a plain style? Does one learn something different from this comparison? No, he says. But it gives me pleasure 'to contemplate the saints when I see them as the Church's teeth' (remember that the Bride was understood as the Church). And, he continues, I also get enormous pleasure from recognizing who the shorn ewes are who have come from their dipping. 'But why I should see this with greater pleasure than if no such comparison were forthcoming from the divine books, it is hard to say, since the subject is the same, and the knowledge is the same... There is almost nothing, in fact, that can be extracted from their obscurities, which cannot be found very plainly said somewhere else.'<sup>26</sup>

Augustine is making a distinction, between 'plain style' and 'obscure style', commonplace in the rhetoric teaching of his time. Rhetoric masters tend to discourage their students from using obscurity—allegories, strange words, ironies, elaborate syntax, far-fetched metaphors (like this one)—for the excellent reason that in the normal conditions of prose oratory, when one is seeking to persuade an audience of the justice of one's position, it is best not to confuse them if one can help it. In the conditions of debate, obscure language is apt to be misunderstood, even taken for tiresome intellectual muddle rather than brilliance. In Preaching, which, with Deliberative, Forensic, and Panegyric, is another type of rhetorical speech, clarity of style is essential, especially when the content (such as doctrine) is difficult, even obscure. Indeed, one favourite homiletic method is to clarify a difficult text through an analytical paraphrase that puts it into plainer language, in essence rendering poetry as prose.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 'Dentes tui sicut grex ovium quae ascenderunt de lavacro.'

<sup>26</sup> 'Et tamen nescio quomodo suavius intueor sanctos, cum eos quasi dentes ecclesiae uideo... sed quare suavius uideam, quam si nulla de diuinis libris talis similitudo promeretur, cum res eadem sit eademque cognitio, difficile est dicere... nihil enim fere de illis obscuritatibus eruitur, quod non planissime dictum alibi reperiatur' (*De doct. christ.* 2.6).

<sup>27</sup> In Stoic and neoplatonist rhetoric, as in the Roman tradition of Cicero and Quintilian, clarity and plainness are primary virtues in public orations. Christian preachers, explicating the obscurities of the Bible, tended, as did Augustine, to see their sermon interpretations as a procedure of 'opening up' (*apertus*) and paraphrasing the texts in plain language that all people could understand—though they acknowledged that this simplified them. While undoubtedly a lot of snobbery (pride and vainglory) lies within the claims of ancient and medieval scholars for their special knowledge 'hidden' from the rest of the world, one should not ignore their delight in the sheer intellectual game involved. Augustine certainly did not; neither did the great preacher at Ravenna, Peter Chrysologus, who said that biblical obscurities began to glow as he contemplated them, their heat setting his

Obscurity and difficulty are particularly features of poetry. Ferreting out possible meanings in poetic difficulty is greatly satisfying intellectual play. This is the pleasure Augustine describes in his meditation on the poetry of the Song of Songs. The pleasure he gets from reading it is neither incidental nor passing—it is the point of his meditation. If he wanted a plain-style lesson, he says, he could read a different part of the Bible and find it there. Poetry is delightful. Whatever meaning it accrues (and of course it accrues the highest of meanings as one's intellect plays in the obscurities offered) starts in that entirely aesthetic experience—*nescio quomodo*, 'I don't know how' or why, but it delights me.

Obscurity announces a particular sort of meditation game, rather as showing up with ice skates and hockey sticks announces a particular sporting game. Like all games, it is to be enjoyed for its own sake and also—since conferring a benefit helps to license one's enjoyment—for the salubrious exercising and strengthening of one's wits. It is play that is both *honestus* and *utilis*, worth doing for its own sake and beneficial. To cite Augustine again, 'quanto magis translatis uerbis uidentur operiri, tanto magis, cum fuerint aperta, dulcescunt' [the more they seem to have been fashioned in metaphorical words, the sweeter they become, when they are plainly interpreted] (*De doct.* 4.7.15). Not the more beneficial they are, though Augustine certainly could have chosen to say that—the hard words 'grow sweet' or 'pleasant', *dulcescant*, by means of the intellectual game. This aesthetic of difficult, obscure style was enjoyed throughout the medieval centuries, in monasteries, universities, courts, in Latin and the vernaculars, in texts pagan and Christian. Riddles, games of form and of metres such as palindromes, macaronics, abecedarian poems, poems that omit using a particular letter, shape poems or *carmina figurata* in which the arrangement of lines and letters pictures the subject of the poem—all these were practised in antiquity and continuously through the medieval centuries and beyond. They are the pastimes of intellectuals, whether in Latin or vernaculars, games during which plain-style 'content' speech is

own inventive apparatus in motion (Carruthers 1998: 45, 62–6). On the virtuous joys of obscurity, much cultivated in late antiquity and after, see Kustas 1973 (late antique and Byzantine), Dungey 1988 (on Aldhelm), and Ziolkowski 1996 (Roman and western medieval). Hebrew and Arabic poetry both also had strong ancient traditions valuing obscure language (Heinrichs 1996; Kugel 1996). The obscurity games of vernacular court poetry have been well studied, especially for the Occitan and French courts (Kendrick 1988; Kay 1995); these had antecedents in Ottonian, Carolingian, and Byzantine court practices (Kustas 1973; Jaeger 1985; Bond 1995). Indeed delight in obscure language games is a symptom of learned cultures, even now.

suspended, and unusual connections can be enjoyed just because it is delightful to make them.<sup>28</sup>

The special value of this aesthetic game was always acknowledged. In the 14th century Boccaccio—that great secularist and inventor of ‘mercantile poetry’, as one of his foremost modern interpreters has characterized him—said of obscurity in poetry, that

[i]t is plain to see that anything gained through hard work is sweeter than something done without effort; content expressed in plain style delights us but passes casually through our memory. So in order that hard labour should make it more pleasing and therefore better preserved, the Poets concealed [their meaning] under things seeming quite counter to it; and so they composed their fables in preference to any other disguise, that their beauties might draw such as neither the demonstrations of philosophy nor her persuasions would have been able to attract.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine, I am sure, was quite serious when he gave many cautions against using obscurities in his treatises on sermon rhetoric, both *De doctrina christiana* (his homage, especially in book 4, to Cicero’s treatise on ideal orators, *De oratore*, and through it to Plato’s *Phaedrus*) and his practical art of preaching, *De catechizandis rudibus*, ‘Instructing the less learned in the elements of the faith’. And for the purposes Augustine was addressing, such advice was surely sound. Yet in his own *sermones*, those types of composition in which, rather than a pedagogical abstraction, he addresses a particular audience, even at times an audience of one, his style is often more in Difficult mode than in Plain. Indeed he loves antithesis, irony, enhanced metaphors, puns, fancy syntax, and all those obscurities which demarcate verbal play. He does this of course when he can anticipate that his fellows will also recognize and perhaps enjoy the game. Let me give an example.

<sup>28</sup> In the dedicatory letter (CCSL 143.115–17) to his *Moralia*, or commentaries on Job, sent in 595 to Bishop Leander, Gregory the Great commends not only the value but the pleasure for readers of the text’s obscurities, deliberately placed there for our intellectual exercise and delight: ‘Quae modis alternantibus multipliciter disserendo ferculum ori offerimus, ut inuitati lectoris quasi conuiuiae nostri fastidium repellamus, qui, dum sibi multa apposita considerat, quod elegantius decernit, adumat’ (‘Expounding the text in various ways, we offer dishes for the palate of different kinds, so that we may banish the reader’s boredom as we might that of a jaded guest at a banquet, who selects what he considers most attractive from the many things set out for him’) (trans. O’Donnell 1994).

<sup>29</sup> ‘Manifesta cosa è che ogni cosa, che con fatica s’acquista, avere alquanto, più di dolcezza che quella che vien senza affanno. La verità piana, perciò ch’è tosto compresa con piccole forze, diletta e passa nella memoria. Adunque, acciò che con fatica acquistata fosse più grata, e perciò meglio si conservasse, li poeti sotto cose molto ad essa contrarie apparenti la nasconero; e perciò favole fecero, più che altra coperta, perché la bellezza di quelle attraesse coloro, li quali né le dimonstrazioni filosofiche, né le persuasioni avevano potuto a sé tirare’ (Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (first version), sect. 152; Mondadori edn, 3.475).

The antique genre of letters, *epistulae*, is not a subject discussed in classical rhetoric manuals, which are devoted to the occasions of public address: deliberation in a public forum, forensic debate (in courts), and epideictic oratory (all other situations of public speaking). Cicero himself commented on this choice at the beginning of his ethical treatise on duties and responsibilities (*De off.* 1.136). But the letter form straddles the familiarity of conversation (the meaning of Latin *sermo*) and the public formality of debate. For medieval Christians, the model was St Paul (Kustas 1973: 34–55).<sup>30</sup> Many of Augustine's letters which have survived address specific situations during his arduous years as bishop of Hippo, a dark period for the north African community he governed.

Such an exchange occurred in 408, between Nectarius, imperial governor of a district within the Hippo diocese, who wrote to Augustine as bishop, asking that he intervene with the emperor Honorius, on behalf of the inhabitants of a town which had continued to observe pagan festivals despite the emperor's edict that no such celebrations should occur. There had indeed been notable rioting and property destruction on one occasion: a Christian church had been set afire and one Christian even killed by the mob. Nonetheless, Nectarius asked Augustine to speak for the town, invoking the Roman ideal of service to country (*patria*) above all in order that the greater public good may flourish (*florat*). Augustine's response devastates Nectarius's appeal, but primarily through stylistic means. For instead of invective and scorn, he begins with some witty play, *urbanitas*, a style Nectarius would recognize as an invitation to familiarity between those who shared a common education (Nectarius was a pagan, though of a Christian family—something with which Augustine, of mixed pagan-Christian background himself, plays).

Nectarius couches his request in a condescending commonplace. Since, he says, among true Romans—of whom he is sure Augustine is one—the delight and benefits of our City grow greater each day, so as life draws near to its end, we wish ever more to leave our country healthy and flourishing ('*incolumem ac florentem relinquere patriam cupit*').<sup>31</sup> 'Well,' Augustine writes in reply, 'I don't wonder, your limbs now being chilled with old

<sup>30</sup> Application of rhetoric to the analysis of Pauline texts and of the New Testament more generally has been an important turn in biblical scholarship of the past thirty-five years, provoked in part by Kennedy 1984; see, for example, Eriksson 1998 and Mack and Robbins 1989.

<sup>31</sup> 'Sed quoniam crescit in dies singulos dilectio et gratia civitatis, quantumque aetas fini proxima est, tantum incolumem ac florentem relinquere patriam cupit' (Augustine, *Epist.* 90, Nectarius to Augustine). (This letter is not in the CSEL edition, but in PL 33.313.) *Epist.* 91, Augustine to Nectarius, begins: 'Iam senio frigescentibus membris fervere animum tuum patriae charitate nec miror.'

age, that your spirit warms with love for your country.' If Nectarius intended the patronizing implications of his letter as a personal rebuke, Augustine has turned it back on him, with interest compounded, through the brilliant irony concealed in gracious phrases of Roman diplomacy. The battle does not end there, of course. In the next several paragraphs of his letter, Augustine turns Nectarius's civic piety inside out through ostentatious punning on various forms deriving from the root *flor-* ('flower'). This verbal root, in Augustine's inventions, blooms abundantly, especially in the opening several paragraphs of the letter. He also extravagantly develops multiple meanings of *cultus*, which could mean 'cultivate the soil', 'an inhabitant of the land', and 'worship', especially religious worship—the factual subject of both letters. As 'flower' (*flor-*) is the root of *florens*, so *colere*, 'cultivate land', is of *in-columis*, the other concept invoked by Nectarius in regard to love of country. Augustine's elaborate game of punning obscurities occupies the first half of the letter, and only when he has thoroughly hollowed out Nectarius's civic platitudes does Augustine finally get to his plain-style narrative of the mob violence against Christians that is the event motivating this exchange. Given the horrific acts, he says, he must comfort and solace his own flock in Nectarius's district, and he ends with a wish that God 'in his mercy grant us to rejoice in your good health'—or does he mean salvation?<sup>32</sup> The phrase is ambiguous, for 'de tua salute' can have either meaning, and express either a trite commonplace or conceal a pointed wish that Nectarius will remember his Christian origins and side with the right people.

The Loeb translator, J. H. Baxter, apologizes for the 'fun' Augustine has with wordplay such as this in epistola 91, and he asserts that Augustine is 'too much in earnest about the truth to be anything but direct, weighty, and unadorned' (p. xl). But its wordplay entirely bears the truth of this letter. Its irony, ambiguity, stylistic 'frills and flourishes' (p. xl) are the point. Augustine skewers Nectarius's false pieties and flatteries, and in doing so shows how absurd and immoral his request truly is. Intervene with the emperor to get your arsonous, murderous mob off the hook? In your dreams, Nectarius, you senile toady! This message is conveyed entirely through the verbal plays of a master of his craft. And if we understand this game it can afford us also much enjoyment at Nectarius's expense, even after 1,600 years—far more (to my taste anyway) than the booming invectives of Tertullian, or indeed of Augustine himself, whose magniloquent harangues can surpass those of Tertullian, as readers of *The City of God* well know. Augustine paid careful attention to his many styles.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Epist.* 91: 'Dei misericordia nobis praestet de tua salute gaudere'.

So must we. In the case of this letter, for instance, a plain paraphrase will miss its truth altogether.

Another master of difficult styles is Bernard of Clairvaux. Modelling his virtuosity on Augustine and Cicero, Bernard in his own work—though a puritan in his moral teaching and his stated dislike of all ornament and over-curious imagery—employed a lush stylistic variety that makes full use of favoured tropes like irony, paradox and antithesis, oxymoron, far-fetched puns and etymologies, strange metaphors, and especially the difficult syntax of *chiasmus*, words syntactically ‘crossing’. Like all skilful orators, he was capable of employing a plain style when he needed to, most evidently in his pastoral treatises and letters, though he sometimes varies it with grandiloquent harangue, as did his master Augustine (I am thinking particularly of his pastoral letter excoriating the admission of sculptures to the cloister, a letter we will return to when discussing variety).

Like Augustine, Bernard delights in well-crafted obscurities, identifying them in the biblical texts and then playing with them so richly, so inventively that the show, the virtuoso performance, becomes inseparable from the content. Exemplary is his method in his sermons on the difficult and delightful texts of the Song of Songs. Speaking within his own Cistercian family, Bernard’s inventive craft is set free. I have chosen one sample from many, his sermons 25–27, on a famously paradoxical text, ‘Nigra sum, sed formosa, filiae Jerusalem, sicut tabernacula Cedar, sicut pelles Salomonis’, ‘I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains [literally, coverings made of hides] of Solomon’ (Cant. 1:4). Is the phrase ‘black but beautiful’, though constructed grammatically as a contradiction, actually so? he asks. Not at all. For *formosa* refers to the composed form or shape of something, whereas *nigra* is a colour; they are in different categories, so are not true contradictions. He observes that many things are made more beautiful, more pleasing through the colour black—the pupils of eyes, black stones used ornamentally, and black hair over a white face. These are wholly aesthetic judgements (and ones that should surprise those who insist that Bernard was always and solely a puritan).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> ‘Non omne denique quod nigrum est, continuo et deforme est. Nigredo, verbi causa, in pupilla non dedecet; et nigri quidam lapilli in ornamentis placent; et nigri capilli candidis vultibus etiam decorem augent et gratiam’ (‘Not everything that is black is on that account ugly. For instance, blackness in an eye does not detract; black stones are pleasing in ornaments, and black hair over white faces enhances their loveliness and grace’) (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Canticum canticorum*, 25.3; SBO 1.164.14–17).

Having thus delimited the aesthetic boundaries of the paradox, *nigra sed formosa*—that blackness enhances formal loveliness (as painters and jewellers know)—Bernard proceeds in his poetic game by teasing out a complex allegory from within it. Playing inventively with the traditional understanding that the Bride is the Church (and the Bridegroom is Jesus), he identifies her dark colour with her human ‘skin’, which covers the beauty of her formal composition.<sup>34</sup> Her skin is blackened by a human stain of hardship, sadness, and trial: by contrast her inner form made ‘in God’s image’ will be revealed in heaven. That is how she is black and beautiful, which is the paradox of all human existence. This same paradox drives Bernard’s own composition towards admitting an extreme discord within himself between expression and experience. He, Bernard, is black inside with grief, not just in his ordinary human condition—*melancholia* or sadness, the black humour—but with an immediate cause. And, in an extraordinary moment, he turns from the general to the personal: ‘How long can I dissemble, while the fire, which I hide within myself, burns up my sad heart, feeds on my insides? Enclosed fire crawls more widely, rages more keenly. What is this Canticle to me, who am in bitterness? The power of sorrow leads my will astray.’<sup>35</sup> With this outburst, he suspends his exegesis to mourn passionately the death of his brother Gerard, who had come with him to Clairvaux, a brother in religion as well as family. He confesses that he has suppressed his own tears even as he buried his brother, but can no longer hold them back. His grief for Gerard is inconsolable and Bernard no longer tries to conceal this. He next rehearses all the customary tropes of Christian consolation—that Gerard is saved, in a better place, glorified—that they will meet again in heaven—that his sorrow for his brother’s death indicates a faithless distrust of God’s goodness. But after all his psychic wrestling, his black human grief masters him: ‘What more? You sought again what was entrusted, you received your own. Tears determine the end of my words: O Lord, impose on them

<sup>34</sup> As we will see in more detail in a later chapter, also underlying Bernard’s play is another traditional etymological and exegetical link between Latin *pulcher* (beautiful) and *pellis* (skin, and by extension cured skins such as tent curtains and parchment). This is developed most in sermons 27–28, as he turns to the last phrase of this verse, ‘*pelles Salomonis*’ (Cant. 1:4) *Pulcher* was always linked to physical beauty, hence to appearance and skin. The commonplace Christian moral trope of ‘inner beauty’ depends for its force on this prior cultural identification of beauty with external appearances.

<sup>35</sup> ‘*Quousque enim dissimulo, et ignis, quem intra meipsum abscondo, triste pectus adurit, interiora depascitur? Clausus latius serpit, saevit acrius. Quid mihi et cantico huic, qui in amaritudine sum? Vis doloris abducit intentionem*’ (Sermon 26.3; *SBO* 1.171.5–8). On this scene and other personal laments for dead monastic brothers, see McGuire 1991.

a measure and end.<sup>36</sup> The brevity of his language shapes the bleakness of his grief. This is not allegorizing or moralizing—there is no lesson here. This is David over Absalom, Lear over Cordelia. Tragedy is rare in medieval literature before Dante, but this is such a moment.

From his own abject darkness to redeemed heights, *nigra sed formosa*; in the following meditation (still on this same verse) Bernard climbs up by means of his own composition. The triptych structure of the sequence of Sermons 25–27 is carefully crafted, with number 28 then serving as a bridge to the next verse topic. Sermon 27 focuses on the word *formosa*, identified with the *pelles Salomonis*, ‘the tent skins of Solomon’, conflated in exegesis with the *pellis* of heaven in Psalm 103: 2: ‘You have covered yourself with light as with a garment: you stretch out the heavens like a curtain [Vulgate *pellem*].’ But there is no logical reconciliation, no synthesis, to be found either in the biblical verse or in Bernard’s dark human experience. There is only antithesis and paradox. The sequence concludes:

O objectness, O sublimity! . . . both earthen cottage and heavenly palace; mud hut and royal court; body of death and temple of light . . . How prudent it is . . . that in the Bride this abjection and this height, in accord with each condition, by their moderation of one another are tempered equally, so that among the variations of this world height raises up lowness, nor weakens in adversities, and lowness restrains height, nor vanishes in prosperous times. Things are altogether beautiful in every way when, though they be contraries of one another, yet they cooperate as equals for the good of the Bride, support her health.<sup>37</sup>

As Bernard states it, the power in this paradox is basically aesthetic. Things are altogether beautiful, *res ambae pulchrae*, when their contrary qualities act mutually on one another to their equal benefit and wholeness. Of course, Bernard’s judgement is also ethical and political, since he is commenting not only on the contrary temperaments of his own mind

<sup>36</sup> ‘Quid plura? Repetisti commendatum, recepisti tuum. Finem verborum indicunt lacrimae; tu illis, Domine, finem modumque indixeris’ (Sermon 26.14; *SBO* 1.181.5–7).

<sup>37</sup> ‘O humilitas! o sublimitas! . . . et terrenum habitaculum, et caeleste palatium; et domus lutea, et aula regia; et corpus mortis, et templum lucis . . . Hoc ipsum quam cautum . . . quod in sponsa deieccio ista et ista celsitudo, secundum tempus quidem, ea moderatione sibi pariter contemperantur, ut inter mundi hujus varietates et sublimitas erigat humilem, ne deficiat in adversis, et sublimem humilitas reprimat, ne evanescat in prosperis! Pulchrae omnino ambae res, cum ad invicem contrariae sint, sponsae tamen pariter cooperantur in bonum, subserviunt in salutem’ (Sermon 27.14; *SBO* 1.191.16–28). Bernard’s exegesis of this verse was an admired and imitated source for other Cistercian meditations on the Song of Songs. An example is in Aelred of Rievaulx’s Sermon 23, for All Saints (PL 195.340–8, at 342–3). In this sermon meditation, Aelred understands ‘blackness’ as ‘grief and great sadness’ (*dolor et magna tristitia*), or melancholy.

but on the warring conditions of church and state in his own day, all manner of 'variations of this world'. But his judgement starts out as an aesthetic premise concerning how things are made fully beautiful. His emphasis on the *beauty* of mutually invigorating contraries succinctly summarizes one chief principle of Romanesque art.<sup>38</sup> And, as in Augustine, this fundamental is conveyed through style, in paradox and chiasmus: 'mud hut' and 'royal court' linked by a simple, non-explanatory 'and'; the 'crossing' throughout this passage of the contraries *sublimitas* and *humilitas* mutually cooperating to create the beauty of the whole.

### THE PLEASURE OF PLAY: THOMAS AQUINAS

Though the general idea of higher and lower pleasures is venerable both in its longevity and its universality, at least in western aesthetico-ethical philosophies, there are some important distinctions among its various articulations. Aquinas discusses human aesthetic pleasures in his examination of the virtue of moderation, *temperantia*. Commenting (in 1271–2) on Aristotle's account of pleasures in *NE* 3, he identifies love (*amor*) as the cause of pleasure (*delectio*). So far he seems to be in general accord with Augustine. But, adapting and enlarging upon Aristotle, Aquinas defines several sorts and degrees of sensory pleasures, instead of lumping them all together as desires or *voluntates*. In so doing, he is able to delineate sensory pleasures that we can certainly recognize as 'aesthetic', and are not solely matters of appetite and *intentio*, and of licit and illicit.

First Aquinas distinguishes the bodily pleasures he calls *corporeales*, which involve things taken in from outside—these he restricts to desires for nourishment and sex. The other sort of pleasures are also sensory, in that they involve pleasure and therefore love, but they are pleasures of the mind (as we would now say). Aquinas calls them pleasures of the soul—*animales*, from the word *animus*, designating the living principle which knows. His examples are love of honour and love of study—these, he says, are solely a matter of interior generation and mental apprehension. But such sensory pleasures include not only loves like honour and study but also loves of beautiful sunsets, melodies, complexly fragrant perfumes. To be sure such mental 'apprehensions' are generated from data taken in from outside by the senses, but the *pleasure* we take is not in the raw data per se but rather the thought object or *phantasm* that we make for ourselves out of those data. These pleasures we also share with animals; Aquinas calls

<sup>38</sup> Memorably discussed in essays by Meyer Schapiro (1977).

them *animales delectationes*, animated pleasures, the sort belonging to animate beings, human and brute. But the pleasure we feel—whether humans or animals—comes after a mental operation on the raw data from our senses, not directly from ‘outside’ (unlike, for example, eating food). Indeed, for Thomas, *animal*, being a formation of *animus*, means something close to what we mean by ‘mental’ rather than what we mean by ‘animal’. Our word ‘mental’, however, is too disembodied to be faithful to Aquinas’s Aristotelian context, wherein souls and living bodies worked closely together, the idea known as *hylomorphism*. I have tried to compromise by using the adjective *animated*, for they are not just reactionary desires, but involve some form of mental work. Behind these distinctions lies, for both Aristotle and Aquinas, the threefold analysis of a living, moving creature (*anima*) into its nutritive, sensory, and intellectual functions. One also needs to remember that living human souls have all three aspects, and so people experience pleasures of both body and mind, mixed together, the whole time they are alive—flux, not stasis, is the human aesthetic norm. Animated experiences, particular to all animals including humans (but not plants), are known by means of the thought objects—phantasms or images—which our minds make by means of our imagining powers from what is received from our senses.

Of these sort of animated sensory pleasures (*animales delectationes*), Aquinas writes (following Aristotle), some are meaningfully subject to moderation and others not. So, the pleasures we derive from our senses of sight, hearing, and smell are what they are in themselves (*secundum se*) and we do not speak of them as ‘immoderate’ or ‘intemperate’ in the way we do the pleasures of eating and drinking, or of sex. But this distinction applies only in human animals (this idea especially is in *NE* 3.10–11). Other animals experience the range of sensory pleasures as immediate desires to be satisfied (‘I want this to eat’, etc.). So, a lion seeing a gazelle does not take pleasure in its graceful shape and colours, but on seeing it wants to eat it. If the lion is sated, the gazelle is ignored. ‘Hounds’, Aristotle says, ‘do not take pleasure in scenting hares, but in eating them; the scent merely made them aware of the hare’ (*NE* 3.10.7, trans. Rackham). Interestingly, this Aristotelian distinction between human and brute pleasures comes very close to the Kantian criterion of ‘disinterest’ as the necessary marker of genuinely aesthetic pleasure.

Aquinas calls these ‘sensible’ pleasures (we would likely call them aesthetic), and defines them on a scale according to those pleasures that bring delight mostly because they are worthy in themselves (*delectabilia quae habent quamdam speciem honestatis*)—these are the joys of intellectual and ethical action (the lover of study and the lover of honour)—and those whose value and benefit are mainly social. These he calls *utilis*: his

examples are the enjoyments of money and friendship. Between these lies another sort of human aesthetic pleasure: enjoyment of human histories, the 'deeds and events' of human beings, such as those contained in romances and the *Dicta et facta memorabiles* of Valerius Maximus, and its many imitators.<sup>39</sup> Reading these is neither wholly 'necessary' (that is, worthy for its own sake, *honestus*) nor wholly social or *utilis*, but a mixture of both: we might say such literary delights combine *honestus* and *utilis*—two qualities which, as we shall see in Chapter 4, are of great importance to a medieval understanding of aesthetic taste and judgement.

But Aquinas's subject here in his Commentary is the ethical virtue of temperance, and not the sources of aesthetic pleasure, or of any value in art other than moral value. So, as is his method, he imagines an extreme case of this pleasure to see if the word 'intemperate' might apply to it, and concludes it does not.<sup>40</sup> Those who overindulge their literary pleasures by listening to and telling stories all day (*totum diem*) may be guilty of wasting their time (*vanitas*), but what they are doing has no moral wickedness (*turpitudine*) in it, and so it is not matter for 'temperance'. (People who watch 'too much' television are the modern equivalent.) It is worth noting, against many modern interpreters who have insisted that secular literature was always thought wicked, that Aquinas explicitly absolves such pleasures from moral fault—the worst they can be is chatty (*garrulus*), showing too much interest in the sorts of narrative detail Aquinas deems 'unnecessary'. In context, this seems to be a stylistic judgement on Aquinas's part concerning the sorts of romances and histories being read aloud, one he

<sup>39</sup> 'Secundo autem ibi: *similiter autem* etc., ponit quasdam alias delectationes animales, quae consistunt in dictis vel factis hominum. Et dicit quod sicut temperantia non est circa delectationes honoris et disciplinae, ita etiam non est circa alias delectationes, quae non sunt corporales' ('In the second place, at "*similiter autem*, etc.", Aristotle takes up those other aesthetic pleasures, which consist in the sayings and deeds of men. And he says that just as Temperance does not apply to the pleasures of honour and study, so it does not to these other pleasures, which are not corporeal in nature') (Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Ethicae*, 3, lectio 19.8). See also lectio 19.17.

<sup>40</sup> 'Illos enim qui amant audire fabulas et narrare, et totum diem terunt vel expendant in quibuscumque contingentibus dictis vel factis, scilicet non necessariis neque utilibus, dicimus esse garrulos, sed non dicimus eos esse intemperatos. Quia intemperantia non solum habet vanitatem, sed etiam turpitudinem quamdam' ('Those indeed who love to hear and tell stories, and waste their time all day, or put value in all kinds of unnecessary histories, that is ones neither necessary nor beneficial, we say are chatterers, but we do not call them intemperate. Because intemperate behaviour is not just time-wasting but morally disgraceful') (Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Ethicae*, 3, lectio 19.8). Aquinas is not talking about gossiping and backbiting, which are serious 'sins of the tongue' (see, for example, *ST* II-II, Q.168, a.3). He is referring to an innocuous activity, such as reading the *dicta et facta* that constituted literary histories, at this time in court circles mainly the vernacular romances read aloud within a circle of courtiers, whose narrative details could also be occasions for discussions of the various issues raised in the stories (Joyce Coleman 1996).

recognizes as an aesthetic assessment and not a moral one. It may well also reflect Aquinas's awareness of the differences between court cultures and that of his preferred university circle, and his willingness to reprove without morally condemning the former's favourite pastimes. In other words, one might interpret his remark as an acknowledgement that 'taste' in such pastimes is only a judgement of preference.

Sensory pleasures, he continues, include not only mental images derived from actual sense data, but also more rational ones. These are, in scholastic psychology, also due to actions of the 'sensitive soul', imagining, thinking, and remembering—'conceptualizing', we might say (making the traditional distinction between conceptualizing, and understanding that is wholly intellectual and distinctively human: the bridge between the two is recollection).<sup>41</sup> The pleasures of sight and hearing, and those arts which involve them are not matters for temperance either, he says (commenting on *NE* 3.10). It is significant, I think, that Aquinas includes sensations deriving not only from natural objects but also from human arts. Colours and forms can be either natural or from art (he includes writing, *scriptura*, in visual art). The examples of pleasing sounds are melodies (consonances of human voices) or those 'likenesses of human voices made by musical instruments'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> An excellent introduction to Aquinas's psychology and its Aristotelian matrix is Kenny 1993. On recollection as rational investigation, see Albertus Magnus (echoed by Aquinas), *Commentary on Aristotle's De memoria et reminiscencia* (both commentaries are translated in Carruthers and Ziolkowski 2002, with further references given there). On the Thomistic separation of the 'good' as a judgement applied to the products of art and applied to moral actions, a distinction clearly formulated by Aristotle (*NE* 6.5) though it is implicit in other ancient writers, see Trimpi 1983: 382–90, which focuses on Aquinas and later medieval poets, including Chaucer. The separation, as Trimpi points out (382), gave artefacts a non-moral status that is often viewed with suspicion in pastoral writing, a genre which, after all, views all pleasures with suspicious caution lest they become 'intemperate', whether the pleasures of monks or of courtiers. But the morality at issue is that of the moral agent, just as Aquinas argues in his *Commentary* on these Aristotelian texts. Temperance, like other virtues, cannot apply to artistic products themselves, since they are *not* moral agents.

<sup>42</sup> 'Et dicit quod *temperantia non est circa omnes delectationes corporales, quae fiunt per exteriores sensus*. Illi enim qui delectantur in visibilibus, non dicuntur ex hoc temperati neque intemperati. Et exemplificat de tribus generibus visibilium. Quorum quaedam sunt sensibilia propria visus, sicut colores. Quaedam autem sunt sensibilia communia, quae tamen per visum maxime cognoscuntur, sicut figurae. Quaedam autem sunt sensibilia per accidens, sicut [s]criptura, ratione eius quod per [s]cripturam significatur... Et dicit quod similiter se habet et in delectationibus quae sunt circa auditum, quod scilicet circa eas non est temperantia vel intemperantia. Si enim aliquis in *melodiis*, idest in consonantiis humanarum vocum, et *hypocrisi*, idest simulatione humanae vocis quae fit per musica instrumenta aliquis gaudeat vel superabundanter, vel secundum quod oportet, non ex hoc dicitur temperatus vel intemperatus' ('Aristotle says that temperance is not concerned with all bodily pleasures which arise from our external senses. Those who take delight in things seen are not on that account called temperate or intemperate. He gives examples of three types of

Comparing Aquinas's examples with typically Romantic lists I am struck (though not surprised) by how weighted they are towards human artefact. Romantic lists are heavily weighted towards natural phenomena. Thomas's examples are not divine or ecclesiastical in origin either (*pace* the Leonine editors' double capitalization of *scriptura*, nothing in this text or contemporary scribal practice confines the word's use here to Holy Scripture only). He actually seems to be trying to distinguish some sensory experience that is uniquely from human art, and separating it off from any necessary moral content or theological symbolism. It is very unusual to find such comments from medieval theologians, and Aquinas himself does not develop the notion in his *Summa*, for example. When he turns in book 10 of his Commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics* to happiness, for which he uses the same word (*delectatio*) as he often does in book 3 for 'pleasure', he defines it entirely in terms of rejoicing in the good and being saddened (*tristitia*) by moral wrong. This is by far his more common theological and pastoral position, as indeed is true in all medieval moral theology: would one expect anything else? Nonetheless, Thomas's comments in book 3 do seem to recognize our experiences of human art as having some components separable (*secundum se*) from just the moral. And indeed as he considers the experiences of the other senses, the complexity of any sensory experience becomes quite apparent.<sup>43</sup>

Odours are more complicated in Aquinas's analysis than sights and sounds. While some are wholly natural, and, like the pleasures of sight and sound, are just what they are (*secundum se*), others have associations—for example with food or with sexual desires—that involve the moral virtue of temperance.<sup>44</sup> Of the first sort are scents of roses, of the second sort

visible objects. Some are perceived only as sensations of sight, as colours. Others are a compound of sensations, which however are known most particularly through sight, as figures. Still others are visual perceptions only incidentally, like writing, [made visible] for the sake of what is signified through the writing. . . . [Aristotle] says that temperance is related in a similar way to the pleasures concerned with hearing; neither it nor intemperance is involved. If someone delights too much, or appropriately, in melodies that are consonances of human voices, and their imitations, that is, what is made by musical instruments in simulation of the human voice, he is not for this deemed either moderate or intemperate' (Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Ethicae*, 3, lectio 19.11, 13).

<sup>43</sup> A similar point is made by De Bruyne 1998 [1946]: 2.290–2, 337–41. His general discussion of Thomas's aesthetic theory is most helpful, not least for the extensive citations, many including generous helpings of the Latin texts. I am greatly indebted to these. All of the Corpus Thomisticum can now be consulted readily online, as can English translations of the complete works.

<sup>44</sup> 'Illos enim qui gaudent odoribus pomorum vel rosarum vel thymiamatum, qui sunt species odorum secundum se, non dicimus intemperatos. Sed illos, qui delectantur in odoribus pulmentorum vel unguentorum quibus mulieres unguntur. In his enim delectantur intemperati propter memoriam quorundam aliorum quae concupiscunt. Et hoc manifestat per exemplum eorum qui esuriunt, qui gaudent odoribus ciborum, in quibus non

women's perfumes and unguents that arouse desire, and the savours of food that are designed to whet appetite. In these latter cases the odour awakens a desire to possess, exactly parallel to how a hare's scent awakens the hound's desire to feed. These are 'interested' pleasures whose sources we want to possess. Such pleasures attach to our sensations of taste and touch, and to odours in so far as they arouse memories of such pleasures (touch is identified especially with sex). And many odours are of both sorts—fruits, for example, or indeed any savoury food (Aristotle used the example of wine as well), when odour enhances flavour and pleasure.

Aquinas examines both taste and touch at greater length in the next section of his commentary, on *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.11. In this section, Aristotle recognized that food tastes are particularly 'accidental' (non-essential) and individual. Aquinas agrees, in an augmented discussion. In common with Aristotle, Aquinas tends to regard taste as a kind of touch, and treats the two sensations together (having previously spoken of taste in connection with smell). Touch is the sense common to all living things, and it is also the sense common to all the other senses, in that in each of the other senses there is contact between the sensed data and sensing organ (even sight was thought to involve touching of a kind, as some sort of ray was sent from the eye to the object and then received back by the eye, processes known as extramission and intromission—like Aristotle, Aquinas thought both were involved in seeing) (Lindberg 1976; Tachau 2005).<sup>45</sup> So touch and taste are the most 'bestial' of our sensations, though even here Aquinas insists that those contacts that are 'especially free [*maxime liberales*], [are] above all appropriate for humans, and used according to reason' (*Sententia Ethicae*, 3, lectio 20.5)—and he mentions the pleasures of sports and exercises, rubbing and warming, activities appropriate to *gymnasium*. 'Free' here must have a class connotation

delectantur cum sunt repleti. Et sic patet quod non delectantur in odoribus secundum se, sed per accidens. Sic enim gaudere odoribus pertinet ad intemperatum, cui sunt concupiscibilia ea quae per odores repraesentantur' ('We do not call intemperate those who take pleasure in the scents of fruits or roses or incense, which are just odours, but those who take pleasure in the aroma of savoury foods or the perfumes with which women are scented. Intemperate people delight in these pleasures on account of recalling certain things they long for. [Aristotle] clearly shows this by the example of hungry people, who take pleasure in the odours of foods, which no longer delight when they are full. So it is evident that these people do not take pleasure in the odours as such but incidentally [to something else]. In this way to delight in odours may become intemperate behaviour, for someone in whom what is desired are the things that the odours call to mind') (Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia ethicae*, 3, lectio 19.15).

<sup>45</sup> Hearing involved 'vibrations' carried in the air to the ear, smell involved 'particles' received through the air directly in the nose, taste of course involved direct contact with food (an interaction with saliva was thought to be what created the flavours we perceive). These accounts of how sensation occurs were widespread and commonplace.

(‘freemen’), in particular referring to the games that aristocrats played in the great households, not the unfree, ‘interested’ work required for subsistence. The pleasures of taste and touch are also those which vary most with individuals. One person likes a feather-bed, another one with costly hangings. Anyone who smells a rose smells that particular rose, but individuals respond to foods quite differently. This part of Aquinas’s aesthetic analysis comes closest to our use now of ‘taste’ to mean ‘individual preference’. But he confines variability, fashionable trendiness, and personal likes and dislikes to these two ‘corporeal’ senses, the least intellectual of all, the ones humans share most fully with beasts—but also the two that are most intensely individual.<sup>46</sup>

My point in examining these portions of Aquinas’s commentaries is that he is not only more confident and ‘liberal’ (in our sense of that word) than Augustine in his philosophical recognition here of pleasures that are not always and only matters of moral assessment, but that he also appears to recognize types of pleasure that are disinterested (to use the Kantian term), a pleasure in something ‘for itself’, *secundum se*, rather than only desiring to possess it. He appears to delineate, however hesitantly, a realm of *innocuous pleasures*, many of which are associated with a court life that is greatly removed both from Augustine’s late antique pagan–Christian crises, and the tensions between political life and cloister in Bernard’s monastic world. And finally, his recognition that some pleasures are individual, and that some human tastes can vary *without incurring moral blame* seems to me an important way to articulate an aesthetic realm in which the relationship of self and social world, of contemplation and action, can be worked out through intricate play between many variables, rather than involving a simple opposition of irreconcilables.

Aquinas also recognized a positive relationship between wisdom and play—not just monastic leisure in general (*otium*) but actual play (*ludus*). For another commentary, an early work on the third treatise in Boethius’s *Opuscula sacra*, he composed a short prologue in praise of study, taking as his theme a text from one of the Wisdom books (Sirach 32). Wisdom is

<sup>46</sup> ‘Secundo etiam ibi *talem autem* etc., ostendit quae sint propriae delectationes. Et dicit, quod non omnes homines concupiscunt talem vel talem lectum, puta stratum plumis aut pretiosis tegumentis. Similiter etiam non omnes desiderant talem vel talem cibum, . . . sed quidam in talibus, concupiscunt hoc, quidam aliud. Unde huiusmodi concupiscibilia videntur esse nostra, quia scilicet ad ea non inclinamur ex natura, sed potius ex nostra adinventione’ (‘Then at *Not all however*, Aristotle shows what pleasures are individual, saying that not all men want such and such bed, perhaps a feather-bed or one with costly hangings. Likewise, not everyone craves such and such a food, . . . but in such matters some desire one thing, others another. Hence desires of this kind seem to be our own because we are not inclined to them by our [human] nature but more by our particular preference’) (Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia ethicae*, 3, lectio 20.9).

speaking: 'run ahead first to thy house, and thither take counsel, and there play (*lude*) and act on your ideas'.<sup>47</sup> Aquinas interprets this verse as counsel to turn to contemplation and study, to turn back to one's own mind from the distractions and cares of daily life ('ad mentem tuam ab exterioribus sollicitate redeas'). For, he says, theological study is a kind of playing, for two reasons: first, it is delightful (and he quotes Sirach 24:27, where Wisdom, employing a common Hebrew trope, says that pursuing her is sweeter than honey). And secondly, because just as what happens in a game is done only for the sake of the game itself and for no other purposes, so the pursuit of wisdom also has only its own pleasures, without anxieties or any sense that it is deficient in something.<sup>48</sup> And Thomas closes this preface with another citation in which Wisdom, describing how she was formed at the creation of the world, compares her delights to those of playing a game (Prov. 8:30–1): 'I was with him forming all things: and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times; Playing in the world: and my delights were to be with the children of men.'<sup>49</sup> 'Delighting every day in play', Aquinas says, means that through all the various days of Creation, knowledge of diverse truths may be discerned. Clearly for Aquinas philosophy constitutes a special area of human activity, disinterested and playing by its own rules (it seems relevant that this

<sup>47</sup> 'Praecurre prior in domum tuam, et illic advocare et illic lude, et age conceptiones tuas' (Sirach 32:15–16). The Douay–Rheims translation is: 'be first to run home to thy house, and there withdraw thyself, and there take thy pastime. And do what thou hast a mind.' In context, this is counsel for a young prince, a version of the 'advice for princes' genre, which was also popular in medieval courts.

<sup>48</sup> 'Ubi considerandum est, quod sapientiae contemplatio convenienter ludo comparatur, propter duo quae est in ludo invenire. Primo quidem, quia ludus delectabilis est, et contemplatio sapientiae maximam delectationem habet: unde dicitur ex ore sapientiae: *spiritus meus super mel dulcis* [Sir. 24:27]. Secundo, quia operationes ludi non ordinantur ad aliud, sed propter se quaeruntur. Et hoc idem competit in delectationibus sapientiae. . . . Sed delectatio contemplationis sapientiae in seipsa habet delectationis causam: unde nullam anxietatem patitur, quasi expectans aliquid quod desit' ('Let us therefore consider that the study of wisdom may be compared to a game, on account of two characteristics found in game-playing. The first of these, because a game is delightful, and the contemplation of wisdom is the greatest delight: wherefore it is said by the mouth of Wisdom: "my spirit is sweet above honey". Secondly, because the plays in a game are not ordered to something outside, but are made for [the game] itself. And this characteristic is also found in the delights of wisdom. . . . For the pleasure of contemplating wisdom is in itself [also] the cause of its delight: wherefore no anxiety is suffered, as though expecting something which it lacks') (Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, prol.). The Boethius work is known now more commonly as Treatise 3 of his *Opuscula sacra*. Leclercq (1963: 43) recognized a similar meaning for *vacatio* in some ancient contexts, where it can mean 'se libérer ainsi de l'emprise des choses et des occupations', to free oneself from one's ordinary business in favour of poetry and study (see also 44–49).

<sup>49</sup> 'Cum eo eram, cuncta componens. Et delectabar per singulos dies, Ludens coram eo omni tempore, Ludens in orbe terrarum; et deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum.' See also Chapter 1 of this book.

commentary was likely written before the doctrinal condemnations of the 1270s).

It is the analogy he emphasizes that interests me, whatever its biblical authority, because it implies that playing a game is not in itself morally wrong, and that it suspends other considerations, yet it is in no way deficient.<sup>50</sup> A certain class of activities, not only philosophizing, is also in this way protected, because they are honest, beneficial pleasures in themselves. It is meaningful too that he emphasizes variety and diversity as a positive aspect of knowing wisdom. And though he did not cite Proverbs 8:31, it develops the theme of verse 30, in the direction of human play ('playing in the world', *ludens in orbe terrarum*) and the pleasures of human beings ('my delights were to be with the children of men'). This is the play realm of aesthetic pleasure, discovering the complexity of truth and enjoying the sociable play of the arts.

Aquinas comments again on the morality of play in *Summa theologiae* II-II, Q.168, defending it against those who wrote that all play is sinful, and that players in particular, *histriones*, since they do nothing but play are *ipso facto* sinners. No, he says, for play is necessary to the sociability of human beings, to their conversations. He adduces Cicero on the efficacy of well-placed jokes and stories for relieving tedium and fatigue, and also Aristotle's concept of *eutrapelia*, pleasure that brings well-being, and which can, for example, turn 'things that have been said and done' (the materials of romances and histories) to our solace and delight. Jokes and stories made for such ends by *histriones* are not immoral but socially beneficial and thus good, as they are for the benefit of human commerce ('utilia conversationi humanae').<sup>51</sup>

Though Aquinas justified the value of play philosophically, using Aristotelian arguments that would become familiar in succeeding centuries, it is clear that creative play was valued in Christian arts from the beginning, with Proverbs and the other Wisdom books providing well-known proof texts. What Bonaventure called *ars ludorum*, whose end is benefit mixed with delight, encompasses a positive though special set of activities, like all the *artes*. Such arts are judged by the choices of both the makers and the audiences, and so the notion of intention is at the core of whether, to

<sup>50</sup> Though I disagree with her implication that the medieval world had to await Aristotle to discover honest pleasure, Rosenfeld's study (2011) of the university debates about love and pleasure in the interpretation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and their role in producing the literary court debates about love, including the *Roman de la rose*, underscores how clerics took their intellectual games with them when they came into the courts, to the enjoyment and edification of all. See especially also Catherine Brown 1998 and Swift 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II-II, Q.168, a.2 and 3, esp. a. 2 resp. and article 3, ad obj. 3.

use Augustine's terms, an activity is *licitus* or *illicitus*, profitably and pleasurably directed or somehow gone off-course. Directed movement is central not only to the moral 'rectitude' of an art but to its aesthetic effect as well, to its very ability to be experienced by moving us. As I said earlier, this way of responding to artefacts considers first not 'What does this work represent?' but 'What is it doing, and what is it asking me to do?' In other words, intended movements that channel our responses in particular ways are built into the work, which thus assumes their agencies.

This quality in all artefacts is rhetorical *ductus*, the 'intended movement' within a work which guides the experiences of those perceiving it. In late classical and medieval theory, an artefact's *ductus* is the sum total of the path(s) that lead one through it. One can think of it (and rhetoric masters did) as the artist's plan in motion within his creation. That plan (called *consilium*) is expressed as varying movements within the work, all ultimately directed to some goal, but with many possible side trips and stopping places along the way.<sup>52</sup> These variations are achieved through its stylistic choices and intentions, the tropes and figures selected for a work (in whatever media) which together make up what was called in Greek rhetoric *to prepon*, translated by Cicero as *decorum*.<sup>53</sup> The artefact as a whole is an agent of many changes and movements in those who experience it, a complex mixing of *dulcis* (pleasure) with *utilis* (benefit). I have characterized this book as being about Style. In these first two chapters, we have been examining the classical and medieval theories of sensory knowing and of intention that underpin all pre-Romantic understandings of Style. In the next two we will take a hard look at the aesthetic complexities of 'benefit' and 'delight'.

<sup>52</sup> For a more complete discussion of this concept, especially in its medieval developments, see Carruthers 2010a.

<sup>53</sup> 'Sed est eloquentiae sicut reliquarum rerum fundamentum sapientia. Vt enim in vita sic in oratione nihil est difficilius quam quid deceat videre. Πρέπον appellant hoc Graeci, nos dicamus sane decorum; de quo praeclare et multa praecipuntur et res est cognitione dignissima; huius ignorance non modo in vita sed saepissime et in poematis et in oratione peccatur' (*Orator* 70; cf. *De off.* 1.66, 93). Cicero also applies the idea to ethical value and social dignity, linking *honestus* with *decorum*; see the discussion of *honestus* as an aesthetic value in Chapter 4. This section of *Orator* was known to the Middle Ages through the art of rhetoric composed by Julius Victor, an important conduit of many precepts from both Cicero and Quintilian.

### 3

## Taking the Bitter with the Sweet

When things are sharp or sweet or salty in proper proportions, then indeed they are entirely pleasing, and all that is mixed is more pleasing than what is single.

Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*

The Latin adjectives *dulcis* and *suavis* are among the most apparently transparent of the values assigned to style in ancient rhetoric, and yet on examination demonstrate, especially in Christian use, considerable ambiguity and range of meaning. This stems in part from Jerome's translation of both the Hebrew and Greek Septuagint in passages that refer to Divine Wisdom and its expression through commandments and religious practices. By this means, in medieval Latin both *dulcis* and *suavis* acquired a complicating layer of meaning that could also affect how the stylistic value of 'sweetness' was understood, even in pastoral rhetoric. In Roman classical rhetoric *dulcis* translated Greek *charis*, usually rendered in modern English as 'charm'. *Suavis* is given in English as 'pleasing', and is considered by some scholars to have the more comprehensive meaning of the two near-synonymous adjectives—its relationship to the word 'persuasion' did not go unnoticed. Cicero observed that, according to Ennius (2nd century BCE), the Greek goddess of rhetorical persuasion, 'Peithō', was called 'Suada' by the Romans; she was said to have sat within the lips of Pericles. Ennius rendered 'rhetoric' (a Greek word) as *suaviloquens*.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, *dulcis* and *suavis* were not the only words for a style judged to be pleasing and persuasive. They could also, chiefly in judgements of rhetoric, be used almost synonymously with another word for persuasive ornament, *honestus*. *Honestus* and its verb, *honestare*, have an important

<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Brutus*, 59, quoting Ennius, *Annales*, 308. On this passage in *Brutus*, see Desmouliez 1976: 220. The pre-Ciceronian development of Roman rhetoric has also been well discussed by Krostenko (2001: see especially pp. 145–53) on the pervasive formula used to characterize the best oratory, *suavis et gravis*, pleasing and dignified. Krostenko emphasizes that the earliest Roman rhetoric developed, on a Greek model, as 'social performance'—the virtues of conversation and friendship—before developing its distinctive ties to legal disputation.

range of ethical and social meanings, but when one encounters variations of this root in discussions of artistic styles, it is well to keep in mind this strong connection to adornment and fitting style. Though seeming to focus on just one word each, Chapters 3 and 4 will actually examine these two roots as whole families of nested concepts, many of which are less than perfectly harmonious with one another. But then, we should recall, human aesthetic effects are never monotonous or single in nature.

Latin *suavis* and English *sweet* are cognate in the same Indo-European root, as is the multi-compounded Greek root (*h*)*edu-*; Latin (*per*)*suadeo* is cognate with this. However, Latin *dulcis* and Greek *glukus* (borrowed directly into English as *glucose*) are cognate in a different Indo-European root.<sup>2</sup> Despite the efforts of many historical linguists to rationalize their various uses, *dulcis* and *suavis* evidently overlapped to a large extent, and distinctions between them in medieval writers are more a matter of preference and the literary conventions within which someone composed than of any demonstrably consistent distinctions. In medieval Latin, the use of *dulcis* and *suavis* for experiences of God, and the emphasis in many biblical texts on divine 'sweetness' greatly deepened and complicated the words' associations in rhetoric. The wisdom and knowledge of God was not an abstraction, but was given a deeply aesthetic dimension in medieval Christian practice and thought. Moreover, in an exegetical tradition originating in earliest trinitarian Christianity, the Wisdom of God was identified with the Son, wisdom's aesthetic aspect (in sensory knowledge) particularly identified with Jesus's humanity. To encompass such profoundly difficult theological meaning, *dulcis* took on dimensions in addition to the ancient stylistic virtues of appeal, delight, and charm. Rather, in medieval aesthetic the strong association of *dulcis* and *suavis* with healing medicine became emphasized, and as a corollary, the mixed and contradictory properties of all human aesthetic experiences.

## PERSUASION AS MEDICINE

The three-way action of sensory knowing, persuasion, and maintaining the humoral tensions/balances of the body is fundamental to western pre-modern descriptions and analyses of each of these three processes, together and separately. Their mutuality posits an experiential, hylomorphic base of human understanding in feeling as well as reasoning, one still apparent in the French word *sens* and its English cousins, 'sense', 'sensitive',

<sup>2</sup> See Buck 1949: sect. 15.35.

'sensible', all rooted in Latin *sensus*. Reason, persuasion, and good health all go together. Their virtuous relationship is summed up in the aesthetic value of *suavis* and its synonym, *dulcis*—the perception that an experience is 'sweet'. The link of sensory experiences and humoral tensions and balances in the body is well established in ancient thought, for example in the passage from Gregory of Nyssa discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed it is the basis of ancient hygiene and medical remedies, which look to diet, air purity (they worried about fetid 'miasmas' and 'reeks' as we do about 'chemicals'), cycles of activity and rest, and for remedies, to ways of rebalancing the humours through purges, herbs, blood-letting, and the like. Speaking of Cicero's approach to style, Elaine Fantham notes well that he regards a speech 'as a body whose attraction derives primarily from its complexion and vitality; from health evenly diffused throughout its limbs. Qualities such as dignity, charm, learning and gentlemanly values, refinement and emotional impact, are inherent in the whole work' (Fantham 1988: 276, commenting on *De orat.* 3.96). And, further discussing the styles, Cicero also said that the lovely 'colour' of each should not be just smeared onto the surface, but it should be diffused like blood throughout the whole body: 'Into these three stylistic forms should be infused a certain colour of loveliness, not laid on as with rouge, but diffused into their blood.'<sup>3</sup> Isidore of Seville even derived *sanguis*, 'blood', from *suavis*, because people of a sanguine complexion are sweet-tempered, moderate, and in good health.<sup>4</sup>

The link between health and persuasion is equally strong and traditional. Plato and Aristotle both regard orators as social physicians, administering to their fellow citizens as doctors to patients in order to preserve or restore health to the body politic. So common is this analogy that it has received less sustained attention from historians than it should:<sup>5</sup> moreover, modern medicine has rendered the analogy more tenuous, less strongly evident than it seemed before the late 19th century. Physical health for Galen was the balance of humours termed *eucrasia*, when—however fleetingly—the various materials of the body in their opposing qualities are 'well mixed' and none is out of kilter with others, the condition of health so well described by Gregory of Nyssa. The physician's office was to redress

<sup>3</sup> 'His tribus figuris insidere quidam venustatis non fuco inlitus, sed sanguine diffusus debet color' (*De orat.* 3.199).

<sup>4</sup> 'Sanguis Latine vocatus quod suavis sit, unde et homines, quibus dominatur sanguis, dulces et blandi sunt' (*Etym.* 4.5.6).

<sup>5</sup> Notably, however, Jacques Derrida revived and developed the analogy for a modern audience in his multi-part meditation on Plato's *Phaedrus* (1981: 63–171). Playfulness is basic in Derrida's meditation on rhetoric, both in its content and in its method. Cf. Lanham 1976, and the essays collected in Lanham 1993.

and maintain this balance, sometimes adding (in the form of potions and infusions), sometimes subtracting (in the form of various purges).

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle makes an analogy between orator and physician as practitioners of arts which try to create the conditions for a good rather than directly producing the good itself. Medicine's function is not 'to restore a patient to health, but only to produce this end as far as possible' (*Rhet.* 1.1.14; 1355b). As the physician finds the best means to aid restoration of the body's own well-being, so an orator by presenting those arguments and topics that may persuade best on a particular occasion can produce the conditions for making sound decisions. This is largely done by means of juxtaposing contraries, as we have seen. But disputation is not just a curiosity of medieval education (and certainly not a peculiarity confined to universities); it is the method of nature herself, mixing, restoring, creating. So, as a physician plays off wet against dry and cold against heat, rhetorical speech restores balance to deliberation by comparing and perhaps combining opposing arguments—'arguing all sides'. Aristotle's comprehensive analysis of human emotions is in book 2 of the *Rhetoric* (not in his *Ethics*, as one might casually suppose), and is organized in terms of their oppositions—anger and friendliness, fear and confidence. Of course, most people most of the time feel a mixture of these contraries, just as their health is a matter of mixtures. Persuasion is less a product than a process, coming to a confident frame of mind and conclusion—what Aristotle calls 'judgement'. But such a judgement mixes in as much good sense from feelings and experience as it does rule-based syllogism.

The analogy of rhetoric and medicine was much employed by Cicero and Quintilian. The 'mixed' character of their procedures remained central. For instance, speaking through his character Antonius, Cicero counselled:

Of course the most desirable situation for the orator is when jurors themselves come to the case [in a particular emotion] suited to what his own interests demand. For, as the saying goes, it is easier to spur on a willing horse than to rouse a sluggish one. But if this is not the case, or if the situation is rather unclear, then my method is that of a diligent doctor [*sicut medico diligenti*]: before attempting to apply treatment to a patient, he must find out, not only about the disease of the person he wants to cure, but also about his routine when healthy and his physical constitution. I do likewise when I set out to work upon the [sensibilities] of the jurors in a difficult and uncertain case; I carefully concentrate all my thoughts on considering, on scenting out as keenly as I can [*ut odor, quam sagacissime possim*], what their feelings [*quid sentiant*], their opinions [*quid existiment*], their hopes, and their wishes are. (*De orat.* 2.186)

And Quintilian, advising on jurors and judges, observes that 'Proofs may lead the judges to *think* our Cause the better one, but it is our emotional appeals that make them also *want* it to be so; and what they want they also believe [*id quod volunt credunt quoque*]' (*Inst. orat.* 6.2.6).<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic element of human good sense, and the always mixed nature of human judgements, as of human experiences, was fully recognized by these writers.

Their teaching was carried directly into medieval rhetoric, which maintained the medical model embedded not only in the classical advice about discovering appropriate means of persuasion, but in the very qualities attributed to the styles themselves. '[S]is physicus', advises Geoffrey of Vinsauf, 'be a physician' to your compositions (he also advises that one should be their barber, giving shape and polish to their shaggy tangles) (*Poetria nova*, 757).<sup>7</sup> Persuasion involved logical conviction, but, since this alone was recognized not always to be sufficient motivation for the action of believing, sensory experience—'feeling'—was required as well. This is expressed as the ability to 'bring-before-the-eyes', *pro ommaton poiein*, which Aristotle and subsequent teachers of rhetoric regarded as the best available means of persuasion.<sup>8</sup> While plain style was certainly valued as an indicator of true speaking, without the quality of actualized (though imagined) 'witnessing' by the audiences—giving life to the lifeless, as Aristotle put it (*Rhet.* 3.11; 1411b.31)<sup>9</sup>—plain style was 'arid' and eviscerated. Being too dry, it could bore and distract the judging audience, as

<sup>6</sup> On the concept of desire as will (*voluntas*), critical in medieval moral thought from Augustine on, see Kahn 1988, as well as Sorabji 2000. Stoic ethics is an essential stage of this development into the Middle Ages: see Colish 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Barbering is also a common model for Geoffrey; see also lines 63–4, 978–80. *Hispidus*, 'shaggy, rough', as a stylistic judgement is used by classical writers for rude and unpolished language, or for those with ears untrained for refined sound: see OLD, s.v. *hispidus*.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle uses the phrase a number of times, one of the more extended being *Rhetoric* 3.10–11. In an important essay on this term, S. Newman (2002: 5) notes that 'Aristotle characterizes "bringing before the eyes" ["pro ommatōn poiōntes": 1386a.34] as a perceptive capacity' of mind, not only a feature of style. We might translate it as 'visualizing', a perceptual aid to understanding, useful in many contexts besides strictly rhetorical ones. See also B. Newman 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle observes that Homer's language makes things live and move—he calls this quality *energeia*, 'energy'. Rhetoric manuals defined a closely related quality of style, *enargeia*, 'vividness', which was soon conflated with *energeia*, and particularly associated with metaphor. But the perceptual force of Aristotle's initial concept was translated into Roman rhetoric also in the word *evidentia*, and well discussed by Quintilian (*Inst. orat.*, books 6 and 8; on these relationships, see Eden 1986). *Evidentia* is the actualizing, 'you are there' quality prized not only in verbal narrative but also in narrative painting. See my discussion in Chapter 1 of the stories concerning the persuasive nature of the paintings of Zeuxis and Apelles. The importance of *evidentia* as a means of 'witnessing' even past events is central also in early modern narrative painting, especially of religious and classical subjects.

well as failing to give the full context of what really happened. 'Just the facts' was never thought to be sufficient evidence to persuade.

As Bene of Florence observed at the beginning of the 13th century, the task of speaking requires warming one's audience by engaging them feelingly so that they may consent to believe you, and individually be led to confident belief through persuasive means, *as a person grows warmer in his feelings*.<sup>10</sup> And in a sermon St Augustine explains the devil's empty boast that 'I have placed my seat in the north and I will be like the most high' (Isa. 14:13), an obvious instance of erroneous belief, as follows: the regions of the north are cold and refrigerate the hearts of men, so that, removed from the fire of divine wisdom, they are not able to understand (*sapere*) any spiritual matters.<sup>11</sup> A boast is a rhetorical act, yet the devil's, Augustine judges, is stylistically *frigidus*, unwittingly expressing his wrong *fides*, both his erroneous opinion of himself and his misplaced self-confidence. Bene is thinking in similar terms—*incalescere* being the opposite motion to *frigescere*. Both texts also play with the meaning of *sapere*, 'know' but also 'taste'. Cold suppresses tastes and makes it more difficult for us truly to discern them, whereas heat makes us more able properly to discriminate.

It is important that we understand the sensory basis of this process of human persuasion. It is deeply misleading to think that only 'emotions' are involved in it, or that oratory makes 'emotional appeals' *instead of or along with* rational ones. Historians need to discard their assumptions that reason and emotion are wholly different things, just as they need to discard their assumptions that style and content in art are readily separable. Medieval narrative valued 'bringing-before-the-eyes' as much as did classical story-telling, and found it in biblical narratives as often as in other poetry. (This is why medieval narratives, such as Dante's *Commedia*, must be read slowly, at a pace and with sufficient coherence to allow one's imagination to create its pictures—reading it 'for the content' is not reading it at all, yet those who read the poem mainly through its enormous commentaries do precisely that.) Imagination creates our experiences from an apparatus of sensory memories available to our understanding through the investigative procedures of our recollection.<sup>12</sup> A vestige of this mental fact lies in the French verb *entendre*, meaning both 'to listen' and 'to

<sup>10</sup> '[U]t concilietur auditor et ad fidem persuasione ducatur, ut animorum motibus incalescat' (Bene of Florence, *Candelabrum*, 8.58.3; 273).

<sup>11</sup> 'Regnum autem aquilonis regnum diaboli est . . . frigescunt ibi corda hominum, et frigida facta ab illo igne diuinae sapientiae spiritalia sapere non possunt' (Augustine, *Sermones nouissimi*, 26).

<sup>12</sup> The scholarship on this point is now vast. One might start with Carruthers 2008, and the bibliography therein.

understand', which also well illustrates that sensation is bound into human understanding from the start.

The words used to describe and evaluate styles nearly all connote sensory and biological qualities. This characteristic is present in the earliest manual of writing style that still exists, a late 2nd- or early 1st-century BCE treatise *On Style* by one Demetrius (otherwise unknown), much influenced by an Aristotelian school.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle used some of these same words (such as 'frigid') in analysing types of style, but Demetrius gives a complete anatomy of them and adds other terms. He defines four styles, which can be found in various mixtures in successful compositions, and which he terms 'grandly magnificent' (*megalo-prepon*), 'polished' (*glaphuros*, like gemstones), 'plain' (*ischmos*), and 'forceful' (*deinotes*, also 'loud'). The faults of these styles are all faults of sensory excess. Excessive 'enlargement', perhaps by using too much hyperbole or overly colourful epithets, does not persuade but leaves a juror cold, 'frigid' (*psuchos*). Excessive polish is flashy and rather pushy (*kakozēlos*); excessive plainness is arid of invention, 'parched', like a dried out river bed (*xēros*). And excessive vehemence is not only too stentorian of delivery but repulsive in its content (*acharis*). In each case, the measure of excess lies with the jurors' responses, for, insufficiently 'warmed' into confident belief, they will quickly turn away. Aesthetic qualities are not definite norms, but specific effects on specific people at specific occasions. And as all proficient compositions mix the styles appropriately, so too their faults can compound: as an example Demetrius mentions *xērokakozēlos*, composition that is flashy but unimaginative. With great understanding Cicero observed:

It is difficult to say why the very things that most stir our senses with pleasure and rouse them most strongly when we first encounter them are also the quickest to give us feelings of aversion and [bloat], and thus to alienate us... Since in everything else the greatest pleasure borders on disgust we need not be too surprised by this phenomenon in the case of speech. (*De orat.* 3.97–100)

<sup>13</sup> The introduction to the Loeb text of this treatise reviews what is known about Demetrius and his knowledge of Aristotle, whom he quotes as well as Aristotle's successor, Theophrastus. Another important pre-medieval writer before Demetrius but displaying similar influences, is the Romano-Greek rhetorician, Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Fantham (1988) argues that Theophrastus, who was Aristotle's pupil and successor as head of his school in Athens, played a key role in developing later ideas about style in oratory. See also Enos 1993 and Kennedy 1994: 88–90.

Sensory experience is the matrix of judgement in all the arts, and many of their productions, then as now, have played to intellectual as well as aesthetic advantage along the knife edges between sweetness and disgust.

The discussion of style best known in much of the Middle Ages, that contained in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, derives from Greek teaching, but adapts it to Latin, for as its author says, the Greek terms do not translate readily. He characterizes stylistic faults in terms that are not only sensory but often medical in derivation. The Grand style can become 'swollen' (*tumidus*), developing verbal tumours that have as evil an effect on persuasion as they do in the body ('ut corporis bonam habitudinem tumor imitatur', 'as a tumor imitates the healthy condition of the body'). At fault, a Middle style can become wavering, *fluctuans*, like a body unarticulated by joints and nerves ('sine nerva et articulis'). The Low, plain, 'just the facts' style in excess becomes dried out and bloodless ('aridus et exsanguis'), as unhealthy as the rest.<sup>14</sup> Quintilian knew similar Greek traditions but characterized only three types of style instead of four. His categories also reflect bodily conditions and physiques. The Plain style is *ischnon*, 'slim', rendered by Quintilian as *subtilis* ('attenuated'); the Grand style 'stout' (Greek *hadron*), and *robustus*, 'made of oak' (that is, strong and in peak condition), so forceful 'it will even raise the dead [*defunctos excitabit*]'. The Middle style he calls *floridus* (Greek *anthêron*), pleasing the audience by its wit and urbane stylishness (*Inst. orat.* 12.10.58–61). And like a doctor treating a body, an orator knows how and when to vary his styles for particular occasions, subjects, and audiences, including many times within a single speech.

The medieval writer best known and most concerned with style is Geoffrey of Vinsauf. He does not define separate types of style. Rather, he counsels—like other medieval teachers of the 12th century—that one should acquire a basic Middle style and then suit it to one's particular audiences and purposes. He describes effective speaking in terms of the craft of cooking as well as barbering: raw or overcooked ('crudus an excoctus'), succulent or dry ('succosus an aridus'), shaggy-haired or combed ('hirtus an comptus'), rough or polished ('rudis an excultus'), meagre or rich ('inops an optimus') (*PN* 910–12). Though some of these terms were also used in moral judgements (for example, *optimus*) they are here assessments of craft, using a lexicon from medieval mechanical arts,

<sup>14</sup> *Rhet. ad Her.* 4, sects. 15–16. In a note (264) Caplan, the Loeb editor, cites a parallel in the Greek work of 'Longinus', *On the Sublime*, 3.4, also a treatise on rhetorical style, likening 'swellings' of verbal style to tumours in the body, equally ill in effect. Instructive also is Quintilian's characterization of stylistic vices and excesses (*Inst. orat.* 12.10.73–80).

not ethics.<sup>15</sup> As in so much else (including his title), Geoffrey was likely remembering Horace's *Ars Poetica*, a text much commented on in the 12th century, in which the ancient stylistic faults are described as commonplace responses:

... [though] I labour to be brief  
I write obscurely; striving for polish [my verse]  
lacks edginess and spirit; having professed grandeur it [just] swells up;  
it creeps along the ground much too safe and timid in the storm.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that, although the faults of style in general are conventions of very long standing, the actual terms that these writers adopted are not exactly the same. They remained chosen from a biological and sensory lexicon but never seem to have become thoughtless, dead metaphors. As Geoffrey of Vinsauf counselled composers, 'be a physician and give to the old new vigour' (*PN* 757), as good medicine revives a tired, old body.

About the same time as Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* and somewhat before Bene of Florence's *Candelabrum*, a professor of law in Bologna, Uguccione, compiled a new version of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, updating not just its contents but the title.<sup>17</sup> Uguccione called his lexicon *Derivationes*, and though it repeats much of Isidore's material, he included new sources and etymologies and instead of organizing materials by scientific topics, as Isidore had mainly done, he groups those concepts he regarded as related under alphabetized headwords. Under the heading of *sueo* (a verb that left scarcely a trace in classical Latin),<sup>18</sup> he groups all

<sup>15</sup> Medicine inhabited a position between the liberal and mechanical arts in many though not all medieval schemes of the sciences. Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon* (?1128) puts medicine among mechanical arts (2.25–7), between food preparation (from hunting and fishing to cooking), and 'theatrics' (games, masques, and singing, and sports that are healthful play for recreation and refreshment). Taylor's commentary on these sections is helpful (1961: 206).

<sup>16</sup> '... Brevis esse laboro, / obscurus fio; sectantem levia nervi / deficiunt animique; professus grandia turget; / serpit humi tutus nimium timidusque procellae' (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 25–8). On the 12th-century Horace commentaries (with editions), see Friis-Jensen 1988 and 1990 (two of the prefaces to these commentaries are translated in Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 551–8), and also Mehtonen 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Uguccione da Pisa (d. 1210) is among the cluster of masters who composed influential texts of rhetoric and law at Bologna just before and after 1200. Buoncompagno da Signa, whose text on rhetoric contains the rotating figure we looked at in Chapter 1, would have been a colleague. Geoffrey of Vinsauf is thought by some to have spent some early part of his career in Bologna before leaving to teach and write in Paris. Bene of Florence was a bit younger, and probably studied with Buoncompagno. On this well-studied Bolognese group, see Murphy 1974.

<sup>18</sup> The *OLD* records only the form *suemus*, used by Lucretius: it regards *sueo* as a hypothetical form. Lewis & Short (whose lexical catchment area extends further into late antiquity) record no more than the *OLD*. The verb that is regularly used is *suesco*, 'to be accustomed to'.

the words related to *suavis* and to (*per*)*suadeo*, which he regards as completely related, as a family.<sup>19</sup> So *suavis* not only is the ultimate root of *suadeo* and *suasor* ('orator') but conceptually of *hortari*, *consulere*, and *monere*, 'exhort', 'deliberate', and 'warn'—the defining motives of the three main rhetorical styles. Horace, he says, referred to *Suadela*, 'dea suasionis', the goddess of persuasion and assent.

Other words in *sueo*'s family include *sodalis*, which Uguccione characterizes especially as eating and drinking societies, social clubs which 'simul edentes', eat together, sitting down (*sedentes*, another member of Uguccione's lexical group) in conversation and friendship. And *sanguis*, 'blood', is part of the family, together with *sanis*, 'health', for good health requires a proper balance in the blood. He discusses the various negatives of these qualities too, using the standard technique of *argumentum in utramque partem*, 'demonstrating from both sides'. Via *sanguis*, he links in *sanctum*, 'holy', then *sacer* and *sacrum*, 'sacred', and then all the words for liturgical uses: *sacramentum*, *sacrificio*, *sacerdos* (sacrament, sacrifice, priest) then a word for a leech, *sanguisuga*, which 'sucks blood'; and finally the entry comes back to *suesco* and *suadeo*.

The confluence of sensation, persuasion, biology, medicine, sociable friendship, and communal experiences of the sacred in Uguccione's lexicon are well displayed in the single word, 'sweetness', Latin *suavitas* and its close synonym *dulcedo*. No single word is applied to aesthetic pleasure more frequently in the Middle Ages. *Dulcedo Dei* is a profound theological and mystical experience. Indeed 'sweetness' is one of God's own names, an essential predicate. In the words of Psalm 33 (in the Gallican Psalter): 'Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus' ('Taste and see that the Lord is sweet'). 'Sweet' also are the pleasures of sensory appetites, social games and gatherings, and holy contemplation. But what unites all these disparate experiences, from appetite to contemplation, is a fundamental observation that what is 'sweet' is both pleasing and beneficial. Its attendant complexities will be the focus of the rest of this chapter.

## SWEET LORD

As understood by medieval writers, 'sweetness' was not in the first instance a theoretical category of 'beauty' or 'pleasure' but referred to a definable sensory phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> We perceive the products of art through our

<sup>19</sup> Uguccione da Pisa, *Derivationes*, S 210 (2004: 1121–5). It is one of the longer entries in this work.

<sup>20</sup> With this section of the chapter, see Carruthers 2006b.

senses, visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile; these human experiences were transferred as well to artistic judgements. Certainly *dulcis* was used for judgements that we now would call 'aesthetic', to refer to the pleasing effects of an artistic style, for example. It is frequently found with words like *iocundus* and *dilectus*. Its antithesis, *amarus*, meaning both 'bitter' and 'harsh', is also used often as a judgement of affect, to indicate an unpleasant sensation, without also making a moral judgement. For example, the Carolingian poet Notker Balbulus of St Gall (d.912) writes in the prologue to his *Liber ymnorum* of a priest from the abbey of Jumièges on the north-west coast, fleeing the devastation of the Normans, who brought his antiphoner with him to St Gall. The verse it recorded did not fit Notker's familiar melodies well, and so, Notker judges, 'While pleased by their appearance, at the same time I found them bitter to my taste [*Quorum, ut visu delectatus, ita sum gustu amaricatus*]' (*Liber sequentiarum*, PL 131.1003).<sup>21</sup> Notker is not making a moral judgement about the verses from Jumièges, but the sort of judgement we now would recognize as aesthetic, a judgement about how his senses perceive something. In other words, medieval aesthetic judgements are not always also (or only) moral judgements. Moreover, the object is perceived to be at the same time both pleasant and harsh, delectable and bitter. This is not an unusual medieval sensory judgement. Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, the most interestingly medieval aspect of 'sweetness'—as with many other medieval aesthetic terms—is that it is not just one thing, but has an essentially contrarian nature that includes within itself its opposites: bitter, salt, and sour.

This sensory paradox is often played upon in medieval invocations of sweetness as an aesthetic response. We can see it clearly in the following passage from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs (number 19). He is commenting on the *oleum effusum* referred to in 1.2, 'Thy name [*nomen tuum*] is as oil poured out.' Bernard glosses this oil with reference to Psalm 33:9, making a firm connection between tasting and knowing. He says to his maiden monks: 'Ergo ex uberibus sponsae opus sumere habent unde diligant. Habet oleum effusum sponsa, ad cuius illae excitantur odorem, gustare et sentire quam suavis est Dominus' ('Thus from the breasts of the *sponsa* they [the maidens] are able to comprehend the work whence they are able to love. The *sponsa* has the expressed oil, by whose odor they are aroused to taste and perceive/know that the Lord is sweet') (*Sermones super Cantica canticorum* 19.7;

<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Calvin M. Bower for bringing this passage to my attention.

SBO 1.112.12–15).<sup>22</sup> Collating his texts, Bernard concludes that the oil is ‘Thy name’ and ‘Thy name’ is ‘sweet’, as Psalm 33 states.

This comment is only part of Bernard’s extended meditation on the oil which is God’s name. He also says, in sermon 15: ‘Every food of the mind is dry if it is not spread with that oil; it is tasteless if not seasoned by that salt [*si non hoc sale conditur*]. If you write something, it has no taste for me / I do not know it unless [*non sapit mihi nisi*] I may read there “Jesus”. If you dispute or argue, it has no taste for me / I do not know it unless [*non sapit mihi nisi*] “Jesus” should resound there. Jesus is honey in the mouth, in the ear melody, a jubilee in the heart.’<sup>23</sup> Notice how pervasively, how persuasively, Bernard emphasizes the connection of tasting and knowing that inheres in the meanings of the Latin verb *sapio*, *sapere*. Notice also the elegance of Bernard’s rhetoric, not just the measures and internal rhymes of his cola and clausulae (‘infunditur/conditur’, the construction ‘Si . . . non sapit mihi nisi . . .’, which is repeated in the following sentence) but also the beautifully rendered chiasmus of ‘Jesus mel in ore, in aure melos’ in the last sentence of this quotation. This is language that demonstrates the aesthetic effect of *dulcis* even as it defines it.

Nor is this oil only ‘sweet’. Indeed, Bernard calls it a condiment, and specifically a salt (*sal*)—the opposite of ‘sweet’. And notice that without that ‘salt’—which is at the same time also a sweet oil—no food for the soul is fruitful or can be tasted: it is ‘dry’ and ‘without flavour’ (*aridus*, *insipidus*). His observation is both about style (an insipid, arid style failing to persuade fruitfully) and human biology. Bernard invokes a medical commonplace, that flavour requires the moisture of saliva in order to develop at all.<sup>24</sup> So the physiological matrix of human knowledge is recognized not only in the sensory poles of salt and sweet, but also in the opposing elements of dry and moist. Even in these most ecstatic sermons of Bernard’s, human knowledge is created from natural psychological processes and sensory experiences, because tasting flavours is also a means of knowing, even knowing God.

<sup>22</sup> The translations from Bernard are mine, after consulting those of Kilian Walsh.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Aridus est omnis animae cibus, si non oleo isto infunditur; insipidus est, si non hoc sale conditur. Si scribas, non sapit mihi, nisi legero ibi Iesum. Si disputes aut conferas, non sapit mihi, nisi sonuerit ibi Iesus. Iesus mel in ore, in aure melos, in corde iubilus’ (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* 15.6; SBO 1.86.17–19). Bernard is commenting on Cant. 1.2, ‘oleum effusum nomen tuum’.

<sup>24</sup> See Aristotle, *De anima* 2.10; 422b, and especially the commentary of Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 7 (‘de instrumento gustus’), who cites Avicenna in particular as authority for the crucial role of saliva (Bacon 1937: 23–5).

Bernard continues concerning the oil:

But it is also medicine . . . In whom has the hardness of heart that is our accustomed experience, the apathy of our indolence, our bitterness of spirit, the languor of our sloth ever stood firm faced with that saving name? In whom, having invoked 'Jesus', has the source of tears, [though] completely dried up, not immediately burst forth more plentifully, flowed more sweetly [*fluxit suavior*]?<sup>25</sup>

The medical principle of curing diseased conditions through applying their contraries is plainly at work: the sweetness and wetness of the oil alleviate hardness and bitterness, as the dry heart flows more sweetly in tears (tears, being both bitter and salt, carry away the excess of those qualities, leaving mind and heart sweeter, *suavior*).<sup>26</sup> Certainly, Bernard is thinking of Christ as the great leech of souls, in keeping with Christ's nature as *suavis*. But perhaps there is also an allusion in these words to the Ciceronian trope of the orator as physician. For, as Jean Leclercq has noted, Bernard earned the epithet *Bernardus noster Tullius* from his contemporaries.<sup>27</sup>

Of all the items in the mixed lexical bag of Latin bequeathed to medieval Europe, 'sweetness'—*dulcedo*, *suavitas*—is among the most mixed and the trickiest of concepts. It is encountered everywhere in medieval literature. That Roman snob turned Merovingian courtier, Venantius Fortunatus, writes how his poems, offered up in the wilderness like those of Orpheus, with their sweetness tame the savage woods and enrapture the feral beasts (those being the 6th-century nobles of Poitou).<sup>28</sup> The effects of *dulce carmen*, sweet song, remained a favourite medieval trope. At the end of the Middle Ages, another Italian, Dante, writes of a different band of rough courtiers—this time dead ones, penned in together at the very boundary of Purgatory's mountain in the Valley of Princes. Dante has been talking to Sordello when all become silent, a crowd seated in meditation. Then one signals the rest to listen and stands with his hands clasped in a traditional prayer posture:

<sup>25</sup> 'Sed est et medicina . . . Cui aliquando stetit ante faciem salutaris nominis duritia, ut assolet, cordis, ignaviae torpor, rancor animi, languor acediae? Cui fons forte siccatus lacrimarum, invocato Iesu, non continuo erupit uberius, fluxit suavior?' (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, 15.6).

<sup>26</sup> This idea is found in early monasticism; see Carruthers 2006a and the bibliography therein.

<sup>27</sup> 'Bernardus noster monachorum Antonius et Tullius oratorum', cited by Leclercq (1966: 6).

<sup>28</sup> On Venantius, see Godman 1986: 1–37; see also Friedman 1970, a seminal study.

... una de l'alme  
 surta, che l'ascoltar chiedea con mano.  
 Ella giunse e levò ambo le palme,  
 ficcando li occhi verso l'oriente,  
 come dicesse a Dio: 'D'altro non calme'.  
 'Te lucis ante' sí devotamente  
 le uscìo di bocca e con sí dolci note,  
 che fece me a me uscir di mente;  
 e l'altre poi dolcemente e devote  
 seguitar lei per tutto l'inno intero,  
 avendo li occhi a le superne rote.  
 (*Purgatorio*, 8.8–18)<sup>29</sup>

(... one of the souls, [had] uprisen, who was signing with his hand to be heard. He joined and lifted both his palms, fixing his eyes on the east, as if he said to God, 'For naught else do I care.' *Te lucis ante* came from his lips so devoutly and with such sweet notes that it rapt me from myself. Then the rest joined him sweetly and devoutly through the whole hymn, keeping their eyes fixed on the supernal wheels.)

The leader is unnamed, ostentatiously so, in a poem where seemingly everybody wants to be identified. The group begin the evening hymn, *Te lucis ante terminum*, with such sweet notes ('dolci note'), sung sweetly and devoutly ('dolcemente e devote'), that Dante exits his own mind ('che fece me a me uscir di mente') along with the rapt singers, in contemplative gaze upon the circling heavens. Sweetness here is the vehicle of meditation and of ascent to the divine. In the poem this sounding sweetness comes as a stark, if welcome, contrast to the disjointed harshness and abrasiveness with which Dante is ushered into Hell:

Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,  
 parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,  
 voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle  
 facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira  
 sempre in quell' aura senza tempo tinta  
 come la rena quando turba spira.  
 (*Inferno*, 3.25–30)

(Strange tongues, horrible outcries, words of woe, accents of anger, voices shrill and hoarse, and among these the sound of hands were making a tumult that swirls unceasingly in that dark air without change, like sand when a sand-devil blows.)

<sup>29</sup> My translation, taking into account those of Singleton (1975) and Sinclair (1948).

Sweetness is not always good, as Adam and Eve discovered. The fruits of Eden were lovely to look upon and ‘ad vescendum suave’ (Gen. 2:9), delectable to eat, and we all know what came of that. A seducer’s words are always sweet, like those of the serpent. Though the Vulgate does not cast the serpent’s words explicitly as persuasion, commentary soon identified him as a persuader. Marius Victorinus does so specifically, for the serpent advances in order to persuade Eve (‘ad persuasionem mulieris’) (*De physycis* 11; PL 8.1301). As a former rhetoric master himself, he was in a position to appreciate a successful performance. In the 13th century, Honorius Augustodunensis refers to him still as *serpens persuadens* (*Elucidarium*, 2.13; PL 172.1144, on the question ‘Quid est concupiscentia?’). The second great persuader in this narrative was, of course, Eve. Indeed, this story in Genesis can serve as an exemplar of the aesthetic and moral ambivalence posed by sweetness. For like the tree itself, like the sweet apple (*malum*) it bears, sweetness is a quality both *in bono et in malo*, good and bad at the same time.

From the very start, *dulcis/suavis* were ambivalent and morally difficult, as is apparent in the comments of both Jerome and Augustine upon the Latin translations of the Bible that made use of such words. Yet they continued in use, notably by both Jerome and Augustine. Moreover their use is characteristic of the Latin church more than the Greek, and in the early church, perhaps especially of north Africa, a phenomenon demonstrated by Joseph Ziegler, the modern editor of the Greek text of Sirach (*Ecclesiasticus*), in a seminal 1937 study of how the concept was translated from the Hebrew and Greek into Latin.<sup>30</sup> Augustine, who was acutely aware of the ambiguity of *dulcedo/suavitas*, even counselling against using these words in translations of the Bible in favour of less morally troublesome words like *bonitas* (goodness), nonetheless called in rapture to his God, ‘vera tu et summa suavitas’.<sup>31</sup> For all its ambivalence, sweetness seems to have been a necessary term, worth risking for the sake of some greater expressive good.

The Genesis story exploits an ancient association of taste with knowledge, evident as well in the derivation of Latin *sapientia* from *sapiens*, the present participle of the verb *sapio*, *sapere*. Both traditions, biblical and classical, are of great importance in medieval thinking about *dulcedo*, theological, rhetorical, and also medical. Isidore of Seville wrote that

<sup>30</sup> ‘La spiritualité chrétienne, et plus particulièrement celle de l’Occident, n’a jamais cessé de faire une très large place à l’idée de la douceur et aux termes qui servent à l’exprimer’ (*DS*, s.v. *Dulcedo, dulcedo Dei*, written by Jean Châtillon; my emphasis). In his seminal study, Ziegler (1937: 16–22) went further and identified a fashion especially north African by the 4th century.

<sup>31</sup> ‘You true and greatest Sweetness’ (*Conf.* 9.1, with an allusion to Ps. 33:9).

'*Sapiens* is from *sapor*; for as taste is able to distinguish the flavour of foods, so knowing is to analyse matters and causes, for whoever analyses also discerns the truth by sense'.<sup>32</sup> This etymological link was greatly emphasized in later medieval writing, especially during the monastic revival of the 12th century. Thus, for example, the 12th-century Norbertine canon, Adam of Dryburgh asked rhetorically, 'Isn't *sapientia* [wisdom] truly *sapida scientia* [sweet-tasting knowledge]?' He cites the epistle of James, which enumerates the several qualities of true wisdom, including that it is *suadabilis*, 'able to be persuaded', merciful and filled with good fruits.<sup>33</sup> And a century later Bonaventure, in this same tradition, exploited the etymology in a sermon, thus:

This wisdom [Jesus] learned and afterward taught, not the worldly wisdom which is foolishness with God; for there are many wise and credited with this wisdom, who in truth are unwise fools in the end. This he did not learn nor teach it, because it is not true wisdom nor flavourful wisdom [*sapida scientia*], for always something is mixed there [in worldly wisdom]; but in divine wisdom there is only pure sweetness and consolation [*dulcedo et consolatio*].<sup>34</sup>

The distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*, *sapientia* being the more exalted and inclusive virtue, is ancient; it is common in Cicero, and may be an effort to render the distinction in Greek between *phronesis* (practical knowledge) and *sophia* (wisdom). It is also a commonplace distinction in the earliest patristic writers, as we will see later. In Christian writers from earliest times, *sapientia* is linked to sweetness, to *dulcedo* and *suavitas*.

The close link of taste to knowing was often exploited in biblical literature as well as in the Graeco-Latin tradition.<sup>35</sup> For example: 'Vinum et musica

<sup>32</sup> 'Sapiens dictus a sapore; quia sicut gustus aptus est ad discretionem saporis ciborum, sic sapiens ad dinoscentiam rerum atque causarum; quod unumquodque dinoscat, atque sensu veritatis discernat' (*Etym.* 10.240). Isidore was correct; see *OLD* s.vv. *sapiens*, *sapientia*, *sapio*, and *sapor*.

<sup>33</sup> 'Quia nimirum est "sapientia quae desursum est, primum quidem pudica est, deinde pacifica, modesta, suadibilis, bonis consentiens, plena misericordia et fructibus bonis, iudicans sine simulatione" (Jas. 3:17). Sapientia sane nonne sapida scientia est?' (Adam of Dryburgh, *Liber de quadripartito exercitio de cellae*, 17; PL 153.829–30).

<sup>34</sup> 'Hanc ergo sapientiam didicit et postmodum docuit, non sapientiam mundanam quae stultitia est apud Deum; multi enim sunt sapientes hac sapientia et reputantur, qui tamen in veritate sunt in fine stultitiae insipientes. Hanc non didicit iste nec docuit, quia non est vera sapientia nec sapida scientia, quia semper ibi quid admixtum; sed in divina sapientia non est nisi pura dulcedo et consolatio' (Bonaventure, *Sermones de diuersis*, sermo 45.2, de s. Marco euangelista; 1993: 2.595).

<sup>35</sup> Intellectual historians have mostly explored sweetness in the theological concept of *dulcedo Dei*. Important studies include those by Jean Châtillon and Joseph Ziegler referenced above; also Lausberg 1967 and Ohly 1989. Fulton 2006 adds many excellent quotations to the ones in this chapter.

laetificant cor et super utraque dilectio sapientiae; tibiae et psalterium suavem faciunt melodiam et super utraque lingua suavis' ('Wine and music gladden the heart yet more so the pleasure of knowledge; flutes and the harp make a sweet melody yet more so a sweet tongue': Sirach 40:20–1).<sup>36</sup> The metaphoric *translatio* from gladdening the heart via song to the delight of learning, and from the sweetness of melody to the sweetness of oratory, is an ancient commonplace, as is the linkage of *suavitas* with *dilectio*. In many of the Psalms, 'sweetness' is linked with speaking the name of God. 'Quam dilexi legem tuam: tota die haec meditatio mea . . . quam dulce gutturi meo eloquium tuum super mel ori meo' ('Oh, how I have loved your law! It is my meditation all day long . . . How sweet are your words to my taste, more than honey to my mouth!': Ps. 118:97, 103). Or Psalm 18:11, in which the fear of the Lord and his judgements are said to be 'dulciora super mel et favum' ('sweeter than honey and the honeycomb').<sup>37</sup>

This persistence of *suavis*, enjoying even a sort of prominence among the divine names, is all the more peculiar since, as I said earlier, both Jerome and Augustine commented negatively on the use of *suavis* and *dulcis* to translate the Greek and Hebrew concepts.<sup>38</sup> In his article on *dulcedo Dei* for the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, citing Joseph Ziegler, Jean Châtillon remarks that the Hebrew root for what is sweet, like the Greek *glukus*, never developed the extended meanings of the Latin. Words used in the Hebrew Bible that are based on the root *mtq* are directly predicated of things that taste sweet like honey or manna, but of other things and persons by means of simile ('sweet as honey') (*DS*, '*Dulcedo Dei*', also citing Ziegler's work).<sup>39</sup> Most often, those words used of persons or abstractions in the Greek and Hebrew Bible that are translated in the Latin by *dulcis/suavis* are based on roots that mean something other than 'sweetness': they mean 'goodness' (Hebrew *tob* and Greek *agathos*) or 'beautiful' (Greek *kalos*) or 'kind, noble hearted' (Greek *chrestos*) or

<sup>36</sup> The Greek speaks of the pleasure of wisdom; the Hebrew speaks of the delight of friends. See Ziegler 1937: 53–54, for the problems encountered in translating this verse.

<sup>37</sup> Origen wrote of this text, 'Candoris autem et dulcedinis habet plurimum . . . quid dulcis, quidve suavius eloquiis Domini' (There are several meanings of *candor* and of *dulcedo* . . . what is sweet, what sweeter than the eloquence of the Lord), associating 'sweetness' specifically with eloquence, as it commonly was; see Ziegler 1937: 76.

<sup>38</sup> In the New Testament *dulcis* and *suavis* are found very seldom. One of very few instances is in 1 Peter 2:3, quoting Psalm 33:9. Another is 2 Corinthians 6:6, where in a list of virtues of the servants of God, *suavitas* is used to translate Greek *chrestos*, though the *Vetus latina* had used *bonitas*. Yet a third is Matthew 11:30, 'iugum enim meum suave est' (my yoke is sweet); again the Vulgate adopted *suave* where the *Vetus latina* had *bonum*. Given Jerome's own concern about this word (see below), these adoptions are curious. On Jerome's changes, see the table and comments in Ziegler 1937: 41–3.

<sup>39</sup> Another essay with helpful citations is Scholl 1992.

‘agreeable’ (Hebrew *‘areb, no’em*). By contrast, both *dulcis* and *suavis* have greatly extended meanings, applicable in Latin to persons and abstractions—as Origen observed of both, they have multiple signification, ideal for conveying textual *obscuritas* and *difficultas*. In biblical Latin, sweetness is often directly predicated of words, eloquence, and voice. For example, amid all the lush sensory language of the Song of Songs, all the tastes and smells and touching, the Vulgate describes only three things as *dulcis*: one is the Bridegroom’s fruit, which is *dulcis* to the Bride’s taste (Cant. 2:3). The other two occurrences both concern language: the *vox dulcis* (Cant. 2:14) of the Bridegroom and the *dulce eloquium* (Cant. 4: 3) of the Bride.<sup>40</sup>

Latin *dulcis* and *suavis* were used by the *Vetus latina* translators and by Jerome to translate Greek *chrestos*. In a letter (number 106), Jerome commented extensively on his decisions, including in Psalm 105:1:

‘Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus’ (Let us praise the Lord, for he is good). ‘For which, you say, in the Greek [that is, the Septuagint] we have read ‘for [he is] *chrestos*’, that is *suavis* [as in one *Vetus latina* text]. But it is known that *chrestos* can be translated either as *bonus* or as *suavis*. But in the Hebrew is written ‘chi tob’, which all with an equivalent word have translated ‘for [he is] *bonus*’. Wherefore it is best advisable that *chrestos* be understood as *bonus*.<sup>41</sup>

Jerome justifies his decision on philological grounds. But there was another serious objection to the overuse of *suavis* and *dulcis*, an objection on moral grounds. Augustine articulates this objection most strongly. In his commentary on Psalm 118, responding to the same problem in translating *chrestos* that Jerome considered, Augustine says, of a *Vetus latina* use, known to him, of *suavis* in verse 65 (‘*Suavitatem [chrestoteta] fecisti cum servo tuo, Domine*’), that *bonitas* is a better rendition of the Greek.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Two things are described in the Song of Songs as *suavis*: the Bridegroom’s *guttur suavisissimum* (Cant. 5:16), usually understood to mean his speech, and the beauty of the Bride, ‘*suavis et decora sicut Hierusalem*’ (Cant. 6:3). *Pulcher* and *dilectus* are the predicates of choice.

<sup>41</sup> ‘[P]ro quo in Graeco legisse uos dicitis: quoniam *chrestos* id est *suavis*. sed sciendum, quod *chrestos* et in “bonum” et in “suaue” uerti potest. denique et in Hebraeo ita scriptum est: “chi tob”, quod omnes uoce simili transtulerunt: quia bonus. ex quo perspicuum est, quod et *chrestos* “bonus” intellegatur’ (Jerome, *Epistulae*, 106.67; CSEL 55). Jerome purged many uses of *dulcis* and *suavis* from the *Vetus latina*, replacing them with forms of *bonus* and *bonitas*: see Ziegler’s tables of Jerome’s changes (1937: 39–43).

<sup>42</sup> Found in the codex Veronensis as ‘*Suauitatem fecisti cum seruo tuo*’; evidently the reading which Augustine knew was something like this. The Greek (Septuagint) is *chrestoteta*, a nominal form. Other *Vetus latina* traditions read ‘*iucunditatem*’ instead of the Gallican ‘*bonitatem*’. Jerome’s Hebrew translation turned the noun to an adverb, reading

We have to remember that sweetness (*suavitas*) can be found in something evil (*in malo*), for unlawful deeds can be enjoyable, and it can occur even in legitimate carnal pleasure. We must therefore understand the sweetness, the *chrestoteta* of the Greek text, to be that afforded by the good things of the spirit. To avoid ambiguity, some of our translators therefore preferred to call it *goodness*.<sup>43</sup>

Given this patristic ambivalence, it is remarkable that the proof text for the conception of God's sweetness, Psalm 33:9, was known in two Latin versions continuously in the Middle Ages: 'Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus' in the Gallican and, in the Hebrew, 'Gustate et videte quoniam bonus Dominus'. The word Jerome was translating was Septuagint *chrestos*, Hebrew *tob*. Both Latin versions of this verse were thought correct: indeed both were sometimes written out side by side, particularly in manuscripts containing Psalter glosses. The problem is not why Jerome changed his translation from *suavis* in the Gallican to *bonus* in the Hebrew (he explained that in his letter) but why *suavis* was continued at all. Châtillon suggested that Jerome was conceding to the expectations of his audience, who had memorized the Psalms as they had no other text and would recoil from having their accustomed language violated. Perhaps—though elsewhere in the Psalms Jerome showed no such scruple.<sup>44</sup>

Châtillon, like Ziegler and many others before him, was concerned with the theology of sweetness, which he understood in a contemporary psychological context (though he does not specifically recognize this in his article). For Châtillon, sweetness describes the affect of God within an individual, using *affect* as modern psychology uses it, where it is distinguished from 'emotion' and related entirely to an individual's experience. But there is danger in understanding it this way. For understanding the term solely as an affect limits or disregards the rational aspect of sweetness, that sweetness, like any sensory experience, is a way to knowledge of the sort that can be articulated, shared with others, and determined to be true or not. *Sapientia*—which I would translate as 'intelligent belief based

'bene fecisti servo tuo'; this is now the standard. See the *Vetus latina* online database (available by subscription from Brepols) under Psalm 118:65.

<sup>43</sup> 'Verum quia suauitas potest esse et in malo, quando illicita quaeque et immunda delectant, potest etiam esse et in ea quae conceditur uoluptate carnali; sic debemus intellegere *suauitatem*, quam *chrestoteta* graeci uocant, ut in bonis spiritalibus deputetur; propter hoc enim eam et *bonitatem* nostri appellare uoluerunt' (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 118.17.1; CCSL 40.1718–19).

<sup>44</sup> See Ziegler 1937: 41–3. Ziegler comments that Jerome very rarely used *suavis* for Hebrew *tob*; this is one of the very few instances. The Lord is called 'sweet' also in 1 Peter 2:3, quoting Psalm 33: 'si gustatis quoniam dulcis est Dominus', and the idea was used commonly later in exegesis of the Eucharist, building on the strong Hebrew association of 'sweet' with divine Wisdom. I have more to say about this in Chapter 4, on 'taste'.

upon experience of the world’—can truly know God’s *sapor* or flavour. But how? This question foregrounds the connection, in Latin, of sweetness with persuasion.

## SWEET REASON

The affective aspect of sweetness has been much commented on over the past century, largely, at least by literary historians, as a matter of aesthetics in the late 18th-century sense—that is, of ‘sentiment’ and ‘taste’. The prevailing 20th-century idea was well expressed by Frederic Raby, following Emile Mâle: the medieval taste for sweetness was due to lay-inspired Gothic pathos, and the emotion noted especially in the poetry of the Cistercian and Franciscan orders expressed an individualistic aesthetic. Personal experience and individual empathy thus replaced what Raby (1953: 419) described as ‘the old calm theological symbolism’ with ‘a terrible and sorrowful realism of detail’, a Gothic ‘new emotionalism’, the second (or even third) wave of that ‘affective piety’ ushered in after the millennium by Anselm and his contemporaries. The details of this analysis are no longer in vogue, but its narrative structure still dominates. The explanations for medieval ‘emotionalism’ that are prevalent now remain insistently focused on the individual, oriented this time towards the psychology of the liminal and strange, the excessive, peculiar, and queer. In other words, to an ever greater emphasis on individual affect and personal taste.

There is another set of Latin words rooted in the concept of sweetness that is just as important in accounting for its ubiquitous medieval usage. These show its long-standing link with persuasion, one which refocuses the concept from the individual to the social, for rhetoric is as essentially social as sensory affect is individual. The tie to rhetoric also demonstrates that sweetness is not simply an affect or a sensation, but has a strong rational component. Persuasion is a process leading to a complex act of judgement and belief. I can best illustrate this with a story, told by the 12th-century chronicler Hugh of Fleury. It is apocryphal, made up well after the purported facts it tells, about the great Carolingian abbot of Fleury and bishop of Orléans, Theodulph (d.821). The story’s inaccuracies are not important for my purposes, for, like most fictions, it speaks another sort of truth. Theodulph fell from grace after the death of Charlemagne, in the revolt of Bernard of Italy against Louis the Pious. Though he probably did not participate in the revolt, his enemies at court took advantage of the uncertainty and denounced him to the king. Theodulph was deposed as bishop in 818 and sent into exile, first to the

monastery of St Aubin at Angers and then (probably) to Le Mans, where he died.<sup>45</sup> An accomplished poet and architectural patron, a major contributor to the intellectual vitality of the Carolingian court, an important imperial adviser—Theodulph was all of these, but the only thing necessary to know about him for the story I am about to tell is that he wrote the Palm Sunday hymn *Gloria, laus, et honor*.

In Hugh of Fleury's story, Theodulph has been imprisoned unjustly by the king in a tower within the city walls of Angers. Like other medieval cities contemporary with the chronicler, Orléans developed an elaborate Palm Sunday procession that involved citizens and clergy carrying palms marching from outside the city to its gates (which were closed for the occasion), holding a ceremony of civic blessing at the gates, and then, the gates being opened, processing through town to the cathedral, carrying their branches and singing *Gloria, laus*. Adopting details of this procession, the Fleury legend recounts that one Palm Sunday in Angers, the procession halted below the tower where Theodulph was imprisoned, and the king (who happened to be visiting) heard the most beautiful verses (*pulcherrimos versus*) of the *Gloria, laus* hymn sung from the tower in concert with the procession below. Softened and warmed (*emollitus*) by the verses, the king asked who it was who sang and, told it was Theodulph, had him therefore at once released.<sup>46</sup>

What the story describes is an act of persuasion, which softens and dissolves the hard heart of the king as he is touched by the sweet song. Therein resides the communal energy of sweetness, not alone in the individual affects that we so strongly associate with later medieval affective piety. The quality of sweetness is what finally persuades another person to desire a course of action and then perform it. In this case, it enables the emperor Louis, by being merciful, to make what is also the more just decision. The tale also illustrates the occasional nature of persuasion, and the need for continual reinforcement and strengthening of will, because, the story goes on, just as he was returned to his own people (*ad sua*) Theodulph was poisoned, at whose instigation the narrator leaves unclear.

<sup>45</sup> On Theodulph's actual life and poems written in exile, see Godman 1986: 93–106.

<sup>46</sup> The story is told in Raby 1953: 175, who got it from Cuissard 1892: 134–48. Cuissard quotes a 15th-century French version from an Orléans manuscript, but a similar story is told by the chronicler Hugh of Fleury, writing c.1115 (PL 163.854); he dedicated his *Libri sex historiarum ecclesiasticarum* to Adela of Blois. Hugh concludes (in the narrative present), 'Sed dum ad sua revertitur, veneno, sicut fertur, extinguitur' ('But when he was returned to his own, as he was being transported, he was assassinated by poisoning'). There is no other evidence that Theodulph was poisoned—or indeed that any of this happened as Hugh says it did, and much to indicate it did not. It is evidently a local legend that enjoyed a long currency in the vicinity of Orléans; interestingly as well, it is a legend about the efficacy of a favourite hymn and the persuasive effect of *dulce carmen*.

A tale of sweetness turned to bitterness, indeed, and fitting, among the *dicta et facta humanorum* of chronicle histories such as Hugh's, to show the powers and pitfalls of imperial decision making for Hugh's noble patron, the countess Adela of Blois.

Both *dulcis* and *suavis* are commonly employed among Carolingian writers as positive and persuasive aesthetic values. When wanting to praise effective preaching, Alcuin characterizes it as 'sweetest counsels' (*suauissimae admonitiones*), as in his lives of the bishops Vedastus and Wilibrord. A search through Alcuin's works in the MGH for the various forms of *suavis* yielded over forty-five examples, in almost all cases modifying various kinds of verbal materials in order to praise the persuasive pleasures they have brought to their recipients. (Alcuin also frequently used forms of *dulcis* in his poems, especially of his friends though also of literary eloquence.) In a rare, but welcome, bit of literary criticism, Notker Balbulus, 'the Stammerer', of St Gall (author of a life of Charlemagne and a most influential hymnal, with whose judgement of the foreign liturgies from Jumièges this discussion began) assesses various Christian poets, including Prudentius, whose *Psychomachia* he characterizes as an allegory of the battle of vices and virtues brought forth in 'a most persuasive sweetness' ('dulcedine suavisime proferentem').<sup>47</sup> The unfortunate idea that medieval writers before the 9th century had little knowledge of or concern for ancient rhetorical teaching and practice took hold in the 20th century, but it is clearly wrong.<sup>48</sup> The playfulness of Carolingian, Irish, and Anglo-Saxon Latin poetry has long been recognized (if not always appreciated), in its sophisticated displays—a kind of court- and monastery-inspired *sprezzatura*—of virtuoso syntax and metres as well as a love

<sup>47</sup> Notker Balbulus, *De interpretibus divinatorum scriptorum liber*, 7 'On the makers of poems, hymns, and epigrams' (PL 131. 1000): 'Si vero etiam metra requisieris, non sunt tibi necessariae gentilium fabulae, sed habes in Christianitate prudentissimum Prudentium... virtutum et vitiorum inter se conflictus tropologica dulcedine suavisime proferentem, contra haereticos et paganos acerrime pugnans' ('If indeed you want poems, you do not need only the fables of the pagans, but you have among Christians Prudentius the most prudent... creating through an allegory with the most persuasive sweetness the conflict of vices and virtues among themselves, fighting most harshly against heretics and pagans'). Notice the manneristic play with Prudentius's name. In this same passage, Notker praises the 'sweetest song' (*carmen dulcissimum*) of Alcuin, as well as the hymns of Ambrose, the biblical epic of Juvenius, and 'the orator Sedulus' (Caelius Sedulius?).

<sup>48</sup> Ward (Cox and Ward 2006: 10–19) succinctly summarizes the state of rhetorical study in the Merovingian centuries, which included those works from the 4th through 6th centuries collected in *RLM*, commentaries on Cicero's *De inventione* by Marius Victorinus and Grillius, a Latin-speaking 5th-century Byzantine teacher who also knew the *stasis* theory of the Greek, Hermogenes. Though usually this is called an 'Augustinian phase' of the transmission of Graeco-Roman language studies, implying that Augustine was the only (if exceptionally rich) known disseminator, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of influences even in this 'dark' period.

for puzzles and shaped poems, *carmina figurata*.<sup>49</sup> This stylistic bravura is verbal *dulcedo* and *suavitas*.

*Suavis* is cognate with the verbs *suadeo* and *persuadeo*, 'to persuade', literally 'to sweeten'. In book 3 of his *De oratore*, Cicero speaks of an 'ornatus et suavis' orator. He tries as well to distinguish *suavis* from *dulcis* with respect to style: a properly *suavis* orator will have substantial and austere *suavitas*, not extra sweetened (*dulcem*) or syrupy (*decoctam*, 'cooked down').<sup>50</sup> In Quintilian and some later rhetoric books, *dulcis* is also said to be a characteristic flavour of the middle style of oratory, but that is not a universal teaching.<sup>51</sup> In Latin, successful oratory is always *suavis*. By definition it must be, for it persuades. Recalling Aristotle, rhetoric consists in 'the ability for every occasion to discover the available means of persuasion'. And what is persuasive is determined with respect to a particular audience: 'the persuasive is persuasive to someone' (*Rhet.* 1.2.1, 11).

This social emphasis—someone speaking to a receptive and judging audience on a particular occasion—was always at the heart of rhetoric. The words in Greek rhetoric for what we now call persuasion relate to the word *pistis*, meaning 'belief' and a certain kind of judgement based in what Aristotle called 'practical wisdom'. In the Latin New Testament, such words are regularly translated with *fides* and with forms of *credere*. So it is interesting that in rhetoric, Latin translates 'persuasion' as it does, as *suasoria*, with such an evident link to an ambiguous concept. From its very beginnings in 5th-century Greece, rhetoric enjoyed (and still does) much the same morally ambivalent reputation that sweetness itself did. Perhaps the choice of *suadeo* was intended to convey some of that ambivalence (in Chapter 6 we will discover a similar ambivalence in the Latin term *pulchritudo*). As did his master Cicero, Augustine frequently plays on the associations of *suavitas*, *eloquentia*, and (*per*)*suadere*, notably in *De doctrina christiana*. Augmenting a favoured debate in ancient rhetoric concerning the relative importance of wisdom and eloquence, Augustine observes that those who speak eloquently are heard more pleasantly

<sup>49</sup> Curtius (1953: 273–301), with others of his generation, had little taste for such playfulness, which he condemned as either decadent and 'mannered' deviance from classicism or simply barbarian ignorance. Such judgements remain influential, in art as well as literary criticism (likely more than they should be), and they should be assessed in turn as reflections of a historian's particular tastes and times, not as linguistic facts.

<sup>50</sup> 'Ita sit nobis igitur ornatus et suavis orator... ut suavitatem habeat austeram et solidam, non dulcem atque decoctam' (*De orat.* 3.26.103).

<sup>51</sup> Quintilian discusses the styles, *genera dicendi*, in *Institutio oratoriae* 12.10, where he associates *dulcis* with the middle style. But the characterization is not consistent, and, as all rhetoric masters counselled, a good orator varies his styles as appropriate with the occasions and audiences of his speeches, and within the same speech. Compare *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.8–11 and Cicero *Orator.* 5–6 and especially 21–8.

(‘suaviter’), those who speak wisely are heard more beneficially (‘salubriter’).<sup>52</sup> He concedes that Scripture says, ‘multitudo autem sapientium sanitas est orbis terrarum’ (‘a multitude of wise men is the health of the world’: Wisdom 6:26). Yet things wholesome but bitter (‘amara salubria’) sometimes have to be swallowed, and perniciously sweet things (‘perniciosa dulcedo’) should always be shunned. But what better than sweet things that give health, or medicines that are sweet (‘salubri suavitate, vel suavi salubritate’)? Wisdom with eloquence is best, he concludes, for there are churchmen who have commented on God’s eloquent words not only wisely but with eloquence. When his fictional student wonders why he has to study his grammar so hard, Alcuin challenges him, ‘Is it not an ancient proverb, that the roots of language study are bitter but its fruits are sweet?’<sup>53</sup> *Dulcis eloquentia, verba dulcia, vox suavis* are medieval tropes as commonly in use as *dulce carmen*, and indeed the phrase ‘voces dulces/suaves’ can refer to voices singing or speaking, to the words spoken or sung, and especially to the well-crafted words of oratory. Sweet-talking is ‘sweet’ because it persuades, by reason (one hopes), but essentially persuasion must invigorate the will, enabling it to act. That is of course its great power.

But persuades to what? The seducer, the teacher, the lawyer, the preacher, and the statesman are uncomfortably close in their profession, as indeed every writer on oratory acknowledged. Quintilian predicated his ideal orator *dicendi peritus* (‘accomplished in speaking’) upon the prior condition that he be *vir bonus* (‘a good man’).<sup>54</sup> Moral goodness is something an orator brings to his rhetoric, not something he acquires from it. Like rhetoric as well, sweetness characteristically occasions and exploits irony, oxymoron, paradox. Its very essence is ambiguous, just as excessive sweetness of flavour rebounds to its opposite, producing the sensations of bitterness and rankness. In rhetoric, sweetness is not limited to one sense alone but can be a property of our experience more generally, using the persuasive tool of metaphoric transference, medieval *translatio* or *transumptio*. Cicero had commented that ‘taste is the sense that is most responsive to pleasure of all the senses and that is roused by sweetness [*dulcitus*] more than the other senses—how quickly does it spurn and reject what is intensely sweet [*valde dulce*]’ (*De orat.* 3.25.99). Medieval

<sup>52</sup> ‘Qui enim eloquenter dicunt, suaviter, qui sapienter, salubriter audiuntur... Sicut autem saepe sumenda sunt et amara salubria, ita semper uitanda est perniciosa dulcedo. Sed salubri suavitate, uel suavi salubritate quid melius? ... Sunt ergo ecclesiastici uiri, qui diuina eloquia non solum sapienter, sed eloquenter etiam tractauerunt’ (*De doct. christ.* 4.5.8). Thanks to David Ganz for reminding me of this passage.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Nonne vetus proverbium, radices litterarum esse amaras, fructus autem dulces?’ (Alcuin, *De grammatica*, PL 101.852).

<sup>54</sup> *Inst. orat.* 12.1, in which Quintilian attributes the maxim to Cato.

writers did not need to hear this only from Cicero. The experience of the prophet John, eating the scroll that is sweet upon his tongue but embitters his stomach (Rev. 10:9–11; cf. Ezek. 3:2–5), encapsulates this essential feature of what is sweet. Sweet and bitter act together in varying proportions; the eloquent yet acerbic prophet's credibility and persuasiveness depend on their interaction.<sup>55</sup>

Sweetness is indeed medicinal; it heals and restores. But it does not work in human bodies like a pill. Medieval medicines were given in order to restore what a Middle English translator of the 14th-century papal physician Guy de Chauliac called 'þe swete accorde'—in Galen, the concept of *eucrasia*, a wholesome balance and mixing of the body's qualities and humours.<sup>56</sup> The first medical goal was to redress excess, typically through purgation—which is not a pleasant, agreeable experience. Indeed it is most frequently bitter and upsetting. When medieval people were purged, as they routinely were, it often took several days for the treatment to be completed. To this end were administered concoctions of bitter and sweet, including honey, milk, syrups, treacles, and the potions called 'letuaries' in English (from Latin *electuaria*), mixed from a combination of herbs and other medicaments. Not all these potions contained sugars (garlic was also an important medicinal), but a great many of them did, so much so that sugar itself, like honey, 'sweet' wine, and licorice, is spoken of as medicine.

For instance, in the 13th-century English lyric now called 'Annot and John', the fair lady is described as follows:

Muge he is ant mondrake þourh miht of þe mone,  
 trewe triacle ytold wiþ tonges in trone;  
 such licoris mai leche from Lyne to Lone;  
 such sucre mon secheþ þat saneþ men sone;  
 bliþe yblessed of Crist, þat bayþeþ me mi bone  
 when derne dedis in day derne are done.  
 Ase gromyl in greue grene is þe grone,  
 ase quibibe ant comyn cud is in crone,  
 cud comyn in court, canel in cofre,  
 wiþ gyngyure ant sedewale ant þe gylofre.  
 He is medicine of miht, mercie of mede.

(*Harley Lyrics*, no. 3)

<sup>55</sup> Bitterness, *amaritudo*, has not had as much attention as *dulcedo*, either from modern historians or from medieval theologians, but it was thought to necessarily accompany the healing action of the sweet. A notable effort to call attention to the poetic aspect of *amaritudo* is Ziolkowski 2003, a study of the Archpoet's lyric, *Aestuens intrisecus* ('Burning within'), which can be read (tongue in cheek, as the Archpoet should be) as an ode to a creative sort of heartburn.

<sup>56</sup> The quotation from the Middle English translation of Guy de Chauliac can be found in the *MED*, s.v. *swete* (adj.), 7(b).

(She is nutmeg and mandrake through the power of the moon, / reckoned true medicine by tongues on the throne; / such a medicine may heal from the river Lyn to the river Lune; / such sugar a man seeks which heals men at once; / a happy one blessed of Christ, who grants me my prayer / when secret deeds are done discreetly during the day. / As gromwell in a thicket green is the seed / As cubeb pepper and cumin famous for its corona, / cumin famous in court, cinnamon in a box / with ginger and setwall and clove-gillyflower. / She is a powerful medicine, merciful in payment.)

Though never described as sweet in this lyric, Annot is every kind of sweet there is, sweet-smelling, sweet-singing, sweet in action, sweet-tasting: the poet sums her up, 'He is medicine of miht, mercie of mede'. In other words, her very name is Sweet, perhaps in contrafactual parody of the God whose name is *suavis* and who is (as Langland wrote) 'leche of lif' by reason of that sweetness (*Piers Plowman*, B.1.204). To be sweet is to be wholesome, without any excess of bitterness or salt: thus water and wine both are called 'sweet' when they are more pure, whether or not they are also sugared. Foods also are 'sweet' when they are wholesome—Plautus can speak of a *suavis piscis*, a fish bought at market that is not yet putrid.<sup>57</sup>

Yet sweet turns bitter with excess, and so often has unpleasant effects even as it restores. Galen had noted that honey, when boiled, turns bitter and that it could have deleterious effects in various circumstances (*On the Natural Faculties*, 2.8.121–5). As we saw earlier, Cicero applied this material quality to rhetoric's sweetness as well, which readily turns to disgust, as a sweet fish quickly rots. Sweetness is a paradox in nature, a sensory oxymoron. But then, God (at least so Augustine thought) is a master not only of nature but of rhetorical art as well, who governs history itself through the figure of antithesis:

For God would never have created any men, much less any angels, whose future wickedness He foreknew, unless He had equally known to what uses He could put them on behalf of the good, thereby adorning the course of the ages like a most beautiful poem set off with antitheses [*quasi antithetis honestaret*]. For what are called antitheses are among the most elegant figures of speech.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> In Plautus's *Asinaria* (*The Comedy of Asses*), the brothel madam, Cleareta, says that her clients are like fish, the fresher ('recens') the better, for such fish 'habet sucum, is suavitatem' (1.3.178–9). Cicero uses the same idiom (without the sexual innuendo) of fresh fish teeming in the sea: 'Quid multitudinem suavitatemque piscium dicam?' ('Why should I speak of the teeming swarms of delicious fish?') (*De natura deorum*, 2.64.160). Citations from *OLD*, s.v. *suavis*.

<sup>58</sup> 'Neque enim Deus ullum, non dico angelorum, sed uel hominum crearet, quem malum futurum esse praescisset, nisi pariter nosset quibus eos bonorum usibus commodaret atque ita ordinem saeculorum tamquam pulcherrimum carmen etiam ex quibusdam quasi

Venantius Fortunatus, with whom I began this section, is best remembered not for his Orphic poems among the barbarians of Poitiers and Tours but for his hymns, among them the original version of *Pange lingua gloriosi lauream certaminis*, sung to the glory of a triumphant God, whose body was stretched on the cross, whose viscera were pierced with iron. It is one of the earliest Christian poems to exploit the terrible paradoxes inherent in the aesthetic quality of *dulcis/suavis*. Consider the following stanza:

Crux fidelis, inter omnes arbor una nobilis  
nulla silva talem proferit fronde flore germine;  
Dulce lignum dulce clavo dulce pondus sustinens.

(Faithful Cross, among all others a unique unchanging tree / no woodland brought forth such a leaf, flower, shoot; / Sweet tree sustaining a sweet burden with a sweet nail.)<sup>59</sup>

The single, noble tree recalls the trees of Eden whose fruits were wholesome and sweet to eat—all save the one whose fruit proved both sweetest and bitterest of all. Like those trees, this one also bears fruit that is sweet to taste, sweetness that is knowledge of God, medicine both for the single soul and, through the liturgy within which this hymn was intended, for the whole community of humankind, and yet that—by a frightening paradox—is most sweet when it is most deadly. This sweetness has killed twice over, first when Eve and Adam tasted/knew the sweet apple, and then when the sweet nails fastened the sweet body to the sweet wood. The sweet paradox is invoked as well in an elegantly compact version of a Ciceronian maxim, cited in a different context by Bernard of Clairvaux: ‘Let the Lord Jesus be pleasurable and sweet in your affection, especially against the wickedly sweet enticements of sensual life, and sweetness conquers sweetness as one nail drives out another.’<sup>60</sup>

Venantius composed his hymn before 600, long before the usual dates assigned to medieval affective piety. The concentrated series of

antithetis honestaret. Antitheta enim quae appellantur in ornamentis elocutionis sunt decentissima’ (Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, 11.18).

<sup>59</sup> This stanza has become a refrain for the whole hymn in liturgical usage, though it is unclear how soon during the Middle Ages this occurred.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Sit suavis et dulcis affectui tuo Dominus Iesus, contra male utique dulces vitae carnalis illecebras, et vincat dulcedo dulcedinem, quemadmodum clavum clavus expellit’ (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, 20.4; *SBO* 1.117). The maxim is in Cicero: ‘etiam novo quidam amore veterem amorem tamquam clavo clavum eiiciendum putant’ (‘Some think, too, that the old love can be driven out by a new, as one nail can be driven out by another’) (*Tusc. Disp.* 4.35.75). Thanks to Marcia Colish for bringing this quotation to my attention.

oxymorons that focus the poem—‘dulce lignum dulce clavo dulce pondus sustinens’—emerged from interwoven philological, theological, philosophical, rhetorical, and medical traditions that fully recognized and exploited, if with some justified apprehension, the powerful dimensions *in bono et in malo* of the adjective *dulcis* with which Venantius measures his verse.

## 4

# Taste and Good Taste

Taste, in its most general acceptance, is not a simple idea.

Edmund Burke, 'On Taste' (1759)

In the previous chapter, I examined some of the complex and changeable qualities of *suavitas* and *dulcedo*, 'sweetness', as a sensory experience, both its physical effect and also when used as a word for the sophisticated pleasures of stylistic effects and the health-balancing effects of sweet and fresh things as medicinals. Sweetness is the sort of pleasure that brings both bodily and mental health to a person and ethical health to a group, though of course, as with all aesthetic effects, any excess is negative. As the meanings of the two words *dulcis* and *suavis* were extended, however, the elementary nature of the flavour, the *sapor* itself, and the fact that it is mixed from opposites and never pure, continued to complicate even its stylistic, psychological, and theological uses.

In this chapter I want to extend that discussion by exploring two related questions. First, are there any words in the medieval lexicon of sensory effects that may correspond to the 18th-century notion of aesthetic judgement as Taste? Secondly (and more tentatively), is there any pre-modern scheme of sensory valuation that could help to account for why Taste (as *gustus*) was elevated to become the word for aesthetic value judgements in general, ranging in use from mystical religious experiences to aesthetic experiences more broadly to food specifically, and also incorporating ideas of discernment and selectivity tied profoundly to education and social class? Or did the idea of Taste as an evaluative aesthetic judgement spring suddenly into 18th-century philosophy where there had been not even the ghost of such a notion before?

From the standpoint of aesthetic history, it is peculiar that the sensations of taste should be so elevated as an activity of reasoned sensory judgement—moreover, a judging facility that can be improved by philosophy as well as experience. *Gustus* is not allied in ancient psychology with intelligent judgement. Taste was considered to have no direct connections to the brain at all, but only to appetites. Cicero does not couple aesthetic worth with any sensation of *gustus*. Indeed he distinguishes, exploiting the well-known pun in Latin *sapere* (examined in Chapter 3),

between the heart's knowledge and that of the palate: 'nec sequitur, ut, cui cor sapiat, ei non sapiat palatus'.<sup>1</sup> In his rhetorical writings, he typically uses Latin *dulcis* to translate the Greek adjective *charis*, in English 'charming' or 'pleasing', not 'sweet' on the palate. By Quintilian's time, *gustus* can, via metaphor, mean something like 'having the quality of' something else; thus Quintilian characterizes urbane wit (*urbanitas*) as 'having the taste of the city', *gustus urbis* (*Inst. orat.* 6.3.17).<sup>2</sup> Ancient and medieval cultures privilege sight above all the other senses when it comes to reliable demonstration, understanding, and perceiving true beauty. Or if not sight, then hearing: for example, in Benedictine culture hearing is greatly privileged. 'Obsculta' the Rule begins, 'Listen, . . . incline the ear of your heart.' And in the Vulgate Bible, the adjective *suavis* is often associated with smell as well as honey and voice, the 'sweetest smell', *odor suavissimus*, that attracts God's favour, for instance when God instructs Moses to burn a whole ram upon the altar in offering (Exod. 29:18).

Most commentators in the Aristotelian tradition regarded taste as a kind of touching, though the two senses have distinct organs through which they operate, flesh in the case of touch and the tongue in that of taste. So close are they that Aristotle wondered whether there are not four senses, though ultimately he defines the usual five; this possibility of overlap continues through medieval discourse on the senses. It lasted at least well into early modern English, in the idiomatic expression 'to feel sweetness', as in this 16th-century example from John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1576): 'And when the gospell is preached vnto vs, wee beleue the mercy of god, and in beleuyng we receiue the spirit of God, which is the earnest ['proof'] of eternall life, and wee are in eternall lyfe already, and feele already in our hartes the swetnes therof, and are ouercome with the kyndnes ['familiar nature'] of God and Christ.'<sup>3</sup> Being able to feel sweetness in the heart is good scholastic somatic psychology, from Aristotle via Avicenna.

In his commentary-treatise on the senses and sensation, Roger Bacon cites Aristotle's *The Parts of Animals* as well as *On the Soul* in order to assert an intimate relationship of taste and touch. He observes that 'to a great extent that which [Aristotle] says about touch he ascribes to taste'.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> '[F]or a wise mind is not necessarily incompatible with a [discriminating] palate' (Cicero, *De finibus*, 2.8.24).

<sup>2</sup> The opposite of *urbanitas*, unsurprisingly, is *rusticitas*.

<sup>3</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1576 edn), book 8, 1242. For this example in Foxe, many thanks to the editors (Mrs David Loades) in Oxford, at the History seminar, 2005–6.

<sup>4</sup> '[M]axime cum illud quod dicit de tactu ascribit gustui' (Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 6; 1937: 17). There is only one extant copy of this treatise, British Library MS Add. 8786, fos. 62–84; it is not ascribed to an author in the manuscript, but is copied with Bacon's *Perspectiva*. Aristotle argues that touch and taste are closely linked, and that both are

instruments (*instrumenta*) of both sensations are continuous with the flesh of the heart, or lie right next to it in a channel, *nervus* (Bacon states that there is disagreement about this). Avicenna, Bacon notes, thought that the flesh of the heart itself was sentient. 'The flesh is the instrument of touch as the pupil is of the eye', Bacon writes, and the heart is the source and origin ('fons et origo') of sensations of touch, since flesh is the organ of touch and all flesh originates with the heart.<sup>5</sup> The heart is also the source of heat ('fons caloris') in the body, and must be continuously regulated to maintain a moderate temperature. It has four helpers in doing this—the lungs and the body's various openings ('pores'), which draw in and expel air; the brain (which is cool); and the senses of touch and taste.<sup>6</sup> The other senses are not given this regulatory role, giving touch-taste a directly health-balancing role that the other senses do not share.

Taste crucially helps to balance health because of its direct role in nutrition. This is probably one of the odder ideas, to us, of medieval sensory theory. All foods are composed proportionally of earth and water (dry and moist). These qualities are, to use the Scholastic term, 'passive', that is they have properties that become activated only in the presence of other qualities. The qualities activating food are heat and cold. So all things that become our food are complexions of these four qualities in varying combinations and with varying degrees of strength. And it is these complexions and 'commixtions' that we make into nourishment for our bodies. (I suppose this is no odder than saying that everything we eat is composed of molecular mixtures and compounds; this is a medieval version.) However, flavour, *sapor*, plays a much more important role in this explanation than we are now disposed to give it, accustomed as we

essential to life itself in ways the other senses are not, esp. in *De anima*, 2.9–11 (421a, 422a–424a) and 3.12–13 (434b, 435b). In addition to those of Aquinas and Roger Bacon, the medieval commentary I have found most useful specifically on taste and touch is Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis de anima libros*. In addition to his commentaries on *De anima* and *De sensu et sensato*, Aquinas discusses five external senses in *Summa theologiae*, 1, Q.78, a.3, and says there that taste is a particular sort of touch.

<sup>5</sup> '[S]ensus tactus et gustus sunt continui cum corde... caro est instrumentum tactus sicut pupilla visus' (Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 6; 1937: 18). Instrument and organ are not the same in this sensory theory. For example, the eye is the organ of seeing, but its instrument is the pupil, which transmits light in order to carry out the action of seeing. The 'instrument' of touch can thus be said to be whatever bodily activity actually transmits a particular sensation. In the case both of touch and taste, the organs of sense (the tongue, the skin, and hand) are at a distance from the heart which actually receives the sensations—these have to be carried to it somehow by an 'instrument'. The debate over touch which Bacon records was whether this was a through a specific channel (*nervus*) or whether flesh alone carried it along through the body from sensor (skin) to receptor (heart). Taste's organ is the tongue, its instrument saliva, received through a channel next to (*juxta*) the heart, Bacon says.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 6 (1937: 22.23–9).

have become to being nourished without actually eating anything at all. Flavour, Bacon says, is 'passio nutrimenti', it is the potentiality of a food to be nourishing.<sup>7</sup> Flavour in food is thus not just some sort of additive, a pleasant but non-essential feature, an 'accident' in the Aristotelian sense. The tongue, because it is flesh is mainly an organ of touch, and by itself is earthy and dry. Thus, the tongue alone does not sense flavour. Since every food is a mixture of earthy and watery material, flavours can become active only in the presence of our moist saliva and bodily heat. Only after we chew and swallow it does our food become actual nutrition for our bodies (a perfectly reasonable position to take before the use of feeding tubes).<sup>8</sup> This means that the flavours, *sapores*, which we actually experience, in themselves, play a critical role in the biology of growth and health.

Flavours alter with our humoral biology, and thus how they are experienced can be a symptom of health as well as a restorer of it. In Arabic and Salernitan medical theory, foods were graded according to their potential qualities, in degrees of hot and dry, moist and cold, and these were taken into account by physicians when prescribing diets for various health regimens and as remedies for disease. This was almost entirely a medical subject, not treated in the more general work of natural philosophy. There are tables grading foods as hot, dry, and so on, but there are also tables of the effects of flavours alone. An interesting survival is the treatise by Urso of Salerno (early 13th century), *De saporibus et numero eorundem* ('Of flavours and their measurements'), in which the physical effects of each flavour are detailed clearly, which flavours are diuretic, which constipating, and so on. Unctuous things, being compounded of moisture and heat, cause disgust (*fastidium*), because as they become more heated their flavour turns to vapours which rise and fill the stomach, inducing nausea. Sour things, being dry and cold, increase appetite because they contract and shrink the stomach, making it feel empty. A sweet flavour is the temperate mean of warm and moist, for sweet things soften, wash, tend, and keep spotless the body's members, and maintain its temperature. Every one of the eight flavours which Urso identifies has a specific effect on the body, caused by its particular composition of qualities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 18 (1937: 80).

<sup>8</sup> Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 7 (1937: 24–5).

<sup>9</sup> Urso of Salerno (Urso of Calabria), *De saporibus et numero eorundem* (1919: 55–6). Urso died perhaps in 1225, and was among the last Salernitan masters: on his place in medieval medicine, see Lawn 1963. The eight flavours Urso lists are *dulcis*, *unctuosus*, *salsus*, *amarus*, *acutus*, *acetosus*, *ponticus*, and *stipticus* (sweet, oily, salt, bitter, sharp, sour, briny, and astringent). A related treatise is edited in Burnett 1991, who notes as well that the claim for taste as a superior sense is more common in medicine than in theology or philosophy.

Flavours are generated like colours, as mixtures between two extremes, Aristotle said; this idea was taken up in theoretical medicine and anthropology as well. 'The generation of colours and flavours is exactly the same, for there are two extremes—from here to there—and all the rest are composed from the extremes, and are generated by the action of heat and cold on dry and moist, just like colours.'<sup>10</sup> Proper *dulcedo* in foods, says Roger Bacon, is the mean between 'insipid, tasteless' and 'unctuous, oily'; it is also related to 'bitter' (*amarus*), for 'insipid' is also an extreme grade of bitterness.<sup>11</sup> He reviews a large number of authorities in this matter, each of whom says something slightly different, but the import of it all is clear. To cite Aquinas once more, 'all that is mixed is more pleasing than what is single'.<sup>12</sup> Not only more pleasing, medieval doctors might add, but in the case of flavours also critical to health.

## HONEST TASTE

The phrase 'honest taste' itself is from an advertising slogan for a cigarette called Lucky Strike. I believe it was coined in the 1950s, at a time when filtered and mentholated cigarettes were catching the public fancy. 'Honest' was meant to convey that this cigarette was exactly what it should be 'plain and simple'. It had taste (as flavour) but it was also in good taste, not pretentious, trying to be something it wasn't. The pre-modern Latin word that best connotes something like what we now call 'good taste' in art and design is *honestus*, with its Ciceronian implications of social value—what is fully 'honest' is both 'worthy' and 'beneficial'. But a further link between 'honest' and Taste in style and design cannot be explained from the classical evidence alone. How that link came about is my main subject in the rest of this chapter.

Before continuing, I should relate this discussion to previous studies of medieval *honestus*, especially Gerald Bond's *The Loving Subject* (1995) and C. Stephen Jaeger's *The Origins of Courtliness* (1985).<sup>13</sup> Both treated at length *honestus* and some of the related concepts I will be discussing,

<sup>10</sup> 'Item, consimilis est generatio saporum et colorum, quoniam duo sunt extremi hinc inde, et omnes alii compositi ex extremis et ex actione calidi et frigidi generantur in sicco et humido sicut colores' (Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 20; 1937: 87–8).

<sup>11</sup> Roger Bacon, *Liber de sensu et sensato*, 20 (1937: 88–91). Bacon discusses particular mixtures and degrees of flavours in cap. 19 (83–6): 'de saporibus particulari secundum opinionem medicorum'.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia 'De anima'* 3, lectio 2, n. 15 (see Chapter 2, n. 6).

<sup>13</sup> Jaeger 1994 also has much to say about courtly values including *honestus* and *dulcis*. I am much indebted to all three of these illuminating studies of Ottonian and Norman-Angevin court life.

including their sources in Roman rhetoric, Cicero in particular. I have learned a great deal from both these studies, which seem to me entirely right in their focus on the court cultures of Adela of Blois, and of the emperors Henry III and Henry IV, during the 11th century. My focus here, however, is different. Bond and Jaeger analysed *honestus* in the context of social behaviours—morals and manners—and that is certainly a major reference of the word throughout its long history. But that is not its only meaning. It has a specifically aesthetic range too, as a value of style in literature and art, as I hope now to demonstrate.

I will begin with a puzzling citation—at least it was so to me when I first found it. In searching for Middle English uses of the word *honeste*, I came upon a stylistic stricture in a building commission from about 1433: ‘the chapelle to be batellet above . . . with a corbyl table . . . and at ayther end iij honest fynys’.<sup>14</sup> I am familiar with honest people and even honest arguments, but what is an honest finial? From the wording of this agreement, drawn up between a stonemason and his patron respecting the church of St Mary-on-the-Hill in Chester, we can still somewhat comprehend this text’s intention. An ‘honest’ finial has to be one that is ‘honourable’, not meant in an ethical sense, but rather finials that people of honour (the great and the good of the parish) will appreciate and judge appropriate for their purpose. Finials are decorative elements; their purpose is to mark a building as a distinguished church built in a style that suits the dignity of a parish of honourable townfolk.

Looking further into uses of *honeste* as an aesthetic value term, in the *Morte Arthure* version in the Thornton manuscript, a valley is described as being ‘Enhorilde [bordered] with arborye [trees and shrubs] and . . . Erberis [small gardens] full honeste’. This gives an additional nuance to the word, for some of the worthiness of ‘honest’ gardens must lie in their being not only well structured and pleasant to behold but also fruitful and beneficial, in this case perhaps medicinally so. We can detect yet additional richness in the word from its use in a version of the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, an early dictionary for students learning Latin, composed about the same time (1440) as my other two examples. The Latin for ‘Arayn [arrange], or to make honeste’ is given as ‘orno, adorno, honesto, decus[s]o, decoro’. Margery Kempe, after her detention for heresy, recounts how in Beverley her captors did not treat her as a common prisoner but ‘ordeyned hir a fayr chambyr & an honest bed perin’. All these uses are early to mid 15th century, and each is a judgement about the

<sup>14</sup> MED, s.v. *honest(e)*, 3a; cited from Earwaker 1898: 31.

style of an inanimate artefact, not about ethical character or personal behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

Yet truth be told, beyond an imprecise sense that an honest finial, an honest garden, or an honest bed is one to someone's liking, and that that someone is claiming for him- or herself a measure of social standing (for 'honest' things are proper only to those having honour), exactly what would constitute such honesty is unclear. In some 15th-century comments about finials and other architectural decoration, 'honest' can be found contrasted with 'curious' or overly elaborate and showy ornament. An 'honest' garden is one that grows well and pleases the worthy, as the properly tended gardens of nobility should. Margery's 'honest' bed is fit for its purpose because she judges it worthy of an honourable person, such as herself. Yet being immediately about style, to call the artefact *honest* is to make an aesthetic judgement in all these instances, even in the case of Margery's bed. The gloss in the *Promptorium* makes this clear—'to make honest' is to adorn and decorate, a synonym of *decorare*. Indeed, the Latin verb *honestare*, formed from *honestus*, has that meaning primarily. But *decorare* also means 'to make honest' in the sense of 'fitting': and it has everything to do with Latin *decor* and *decorum*, words meaning 'fit', 'right', and 'proper' in both a social and ornamental sense, indeed, with what is 'in good taste'. An 'honest finial' is a suitably tasteful finial, undoubtedly (in 1433) one in the style we now call Decorated. All the Latin synonyms listed in the *Promptorium*—*orno*, *adorno*, *decoro*—are to do with just these same values.

*Honestus* certainly carried some aesthetic meaning in classical antiquity, though not consistently. The most influential discussion of *honestus* is at the heart of Cicero's ethical treatise *De officiis* (*On Duties*), well known through the Middle Ages both directly and through anthologized excerpts. St Ambrose wrote an adaptation of it for Christian clerics, *De officiis ministrorum*—this cemented the worthiness of Cicero's original throughout the Middle Ages. In his work 'On Duties', Cicero completely merges *honestus* with *decorum*: 'The essence of *decorum* is this, that it cannot be separated from *honestus*: for what is fitting [*decet*] is morally right [*honestus*], and what is morally right is fitting.'<sup>16</sup> Though he is mainly concerned with social responsibilities and styles of behaviour, the inseparability of the two qualities could extend also to judgements of

<sup>15</sup> The examples, all cited from *MED*, s.v. *honest(e)*, 3a, are as follows: from the Thornton manuscript *Morte Arthur*, 3245 (EETS 8); from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 130 (EETS 212); from the *Promptorium parvulorum* version in British Library Harley MS 221 (Camden Society 25.14).

<sup>16</sup> '[*Decoris*] vis ea est, ut ab honesto non queat separari; nam et quod decet honestum est, et quod honestum est decet' (Cicero, *De off.* 1.94).

value in the arts. 'Wisdom [*sapientia*] is the foundation of eloquence, as of all else', Cicero says in *Orator*. And, just as in life, wisdom is required 'to judge what is decorous and appropriate [*quid deceat videre*]. The Greeks call it *prepon*; let us call it *decorum*.'<sup>17</sup>

The complex semantic field that *honestus* had in antiquity carried over into the Middle Ages. In particular, it has had an important and long-lived place in rhetorical advice as an essential value of effective, beneficial persuasion. Throughout the Middle Ages, rhetoric's purpose was understood to be to establish and maintain social and civic bonds. At the start of his juvenile work, *De inventione*, Cicero had written how the art and skills of rhetoric arose from 'the most honest of causes', *ex honestissimis causis* (1.1.2), understanding *causa* not just in a legal sense as 'case' but generally, as 'what is to be discussed and decided'. Cicero tells a story commonplace in his day, of how human beings 'wandered at large in the fields and lived on wild fare' without social norms, laws, or religion, ruled only by violence, blind ignorance, and their passions, until a man, 'magnus et sapiens', great and wise, assembled everyone and began to teach them all things 'useful' and 'honest', *res utilis et honesta*. The crowd at first was surly but began to listen with attention as he spoke to them with reason and eloquence, and thus by his oratory, the man transformed them from feral beasts to civilized, gentle humans (*De invent.* 1.2; cf. *De orat.* 1.32–4). This was, says Cicero, the originary act of persuasion, and ever since humans have worked together voluntarily for their common good, persuaded by eloquence to act upon those social truths that they had discovered through reason. *Honestus* is a word thus bound into the very essence of Latin rhetoric, and in considering the nature of persuasion it is a good touchstone.

This socializing myth of rhetoric was promoted from the early Middle Ages not in Cicero's text alone, but through the commentary of Marius Victorinus (c.350), which was in some ways even better known, Victorinus having the added authority of being a Christian convert and a rhetoric

<sup>17</sup> 'Sed est eloquentiae sicut reliquarum rerum fundamentum sapientia. Vt enim in vita sic in oratione nihil est difficilius quam quid deceat videre. *Πρέπον* appellant hoc Graeci, nos dicamus sane decorum' (Cicero, *Orator* 70). Though the 'mutilated' manuscript tradition of *Orator* known during most of the Middle Ages only began at section 91, the 4th-century rhetoric master, Julius Victor, transmitted many parts of it, including Cicero's translation of Greek *prepon* as Latin *decorum*, in his *Ars rhetorica*, cap. 22 (RLM 439.9–11). The present state of our knowledge of the medieval (to the 15th century) dissemination of Cicero's various rhetorical works is conveniently summarized in Taylor-Briggs 2006; on *Orator* see especially pp. 101–2. On medieval knowledge of Quintilian, see Ward 1995b, a helpful reminder that copies of original texts were not the only means of access scholars had to Roman rhetoric.

master admired by Augustine.<sup>18</sup> In his commentary on Cicero's *De inventione*, Victorinus paid extended attention to the word *honestus* in Cicero's definition of rhetoric as demonstrating 'rem utilem et honestam'. Concerning this phrase, Victorinus wrote:

What is honest or honourable is rightly called 'honest' when it is [mingled] with benefit, because that which is joined or two-fold takes its name from what is in the greater proportion... For something honourable is always joined to what is beneficial, and the beneficial to what is honourable. Indeed Socrates said, nothing is beneficial if it is not honest, nothing honest that is not beneficial.<sup>19</sup>

Only in the rarified discourse of philosophers, Victorinus continues, can the idea of *honestas* be isolated, but if it is isolated as a solitary good, it is not truly beneficial (*utilis*). Equally, *utilitas* ('benefit') all by itself is mere acquisition (*commoditas*), undertaken only for individual gain, and thus it is not honest. Cicero, says Victorinus, taught that there are two sorts of honour (*honestas*), one pure, the other mixed with social advantage and benefit (*utilis*). One must seek, in any particular situation, the best mixture of benefit and honour. And like Cicero and Quintilian, Victorinus does not at all hold that the mixing of 'honour' with 'benefit' lessens its value—whether 'pure' or 'mixed', the word *honestus* properly applies. In rhetorically crafted speech, what is *honestus* is always 'mingled' with what is *utilis*, says Victorinus, like a pile of mixed wheat and barley grains in which each grain retains its nature but together they make a better whole:

But however these two may be mixed, they are not mixed as water is mixed with wine, so that they can in no way be separated, but are mixed so that they seem able to be separated, in the manner of a pile made from wheat and barley. However these two may be mixed, they can nonetheless be in some manner separated... Now indeed, since a city is made from men collected and congregated together, how should the citizens be persuaded? what should be convincing to men? Not that 'honesty' by itself which is of the philosophers, nor the 'advantage' of corrupt men, but that honest and beneficial middle ground which is employed in all public affairs, all civilized life.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Augustine, *Conf.*, books 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> 'Honestum uero illud cum utili ideo honestum uocatur, quia id quod iunctum ac duplex est ab eo quod maius est nomen accipit... Quod quidem honestum utilitati semper adiunctum est et utilitas honestati. Hoc etiam Socrates ait, nihil esse utile, quod non honestum sit, nihil honestum, quod non utile sit' (Marius Victorinus, on Cicero, *De invent.* 1.2; from *Explanationes in Ciceronis Rhetoricam*, 1.2).

<sup>20</sup> 'Sed quamquam haec duo iuncta sint, non tamen ita mixta sunt ut uino aqua miscetur, scilicet ut secerni nullo modo possint, sed ita mixta sunt ut secerni posse

Together, these are the ingredient of all civilized life, as the grain mixture is of good bread. The category *honestus*, with *utilis*, is thus fundamental in all Ciceronian rhetoric because their mixture is both the glue and the engine of civilized communities.

In his brief discussion of civic rhetoric (c.790), composed in the form of a dialogue with the emperor Charlemagne, Alcuin characterizes the best style as being 'well made' (*facundus*), as well as clear (*apertus*), not using exotic language or incoherently obscure syntax. It needs all at the same time to be *ornatus* (stylistically ornamented with figures and tropes) and *dignus* (a synonym of *honestus*), *decens* ('tasteful' in our sense), *composita* (composed with the rhythmic properties that help make one's words 'sweet'), and *compacta* (its transitions well joined up).<sup>21</sup> The value terms that Alcuin stresses are thus all associated with stylistic figuration and decoration; decency, dignity, propriety, verbal figuration, and aural decoration all bound up together in a single, equally social and sensory, value. Alcuin stresses that Charlemagne must learn to compose and speak beautifully because that is part of his rank, *honor*. Avoiding exotic words and difficult syntax does not mean, Alcuin emphasizes, that one should avoid figural language entirely. On the contrary, an aspect of honour consists in being able to speak with appropriate metaphors, that accord fittingly with their subject matters.<sup>22</sup> In this discussion of style, Alcuin depended heavily on the rhetorical work of a 4th-century Latin master, Julius Victor, who in turn transmitted, in summary form, many precepts from both Cicero and Quintilian. Julius Victor's section on style derives chiefly from Cicero's *De oratore* and *Orator*, and similar advice

uideantur, quem ad modum si fiat acervus ex tritico et hordeo. Quamquam ergo duo haec mixta sint, tamen aliquo modo et secerni possunt . . . Nunc ergo, quoniam collectis hominibus et congregatis ciuitas facta est, quid debet persuaderi? quid hominibus insinuari? Non honestum illud solum quod philosophorum est, non commoditas, quae hominum perditorum est, sed illud medium honestum atque utile quod in omni re publica, quod in omni ciuitate uersatur' (Marius Victorinus, *Explanationes in Ciceronis Rhetoricam*, 1.2).

<sup>21</sup> Alcuin's *Dialogus de rhetorica* is edited by Halm (1863: 523–50). An edition is also in PL 101. It was re-edited with a facing-page translation and extensive introduction and notes by Howell (Alcuin 1941). Howell's translation, though lively and readable, is also—at least in the style section—more interpretatively free than the Latin quite warrants.

<sup>22</sup> 'K. An undecunque licet ducere translationem? A. Nequaquam, sed tantum de honestis rebus' ('Carolus. Is it all right to fetch a metaphor from anywhere? Albinus. Not at all, but only from things that are decorous and fitting') (Alcuin, *Dialogus de rhetorica*, 37). Howell's translation consistently emphasizes the social and moral aspect of these words for stylistic value and understates their equal emphasis on decoration and pleasure, though to do so changes the balance of the Latin meaning. After all, English 'decent' and 'decorate' are both derived from the same Latin word, *deceat*.

in Quintilian. The traditional Ciceronian value of stylistic decorum, Aristotelian *prepon*, was certainly not lost through this transmission.<sup>23</sup>

But what about *honestus* and its kin when used as particular qualities of artistic style and applied to a lifeless artefact? 'Honestus' is an instance of a word that starts out as a social and ethical category, and is then extended additionally to style. It travelled an opposite path to 'sweetness' and to many other common antique and medieval words for stylistic effects. From the Latin word *honor*, it is used both in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and in *De inventione* to characterize one of the four (or five) types of *causae* (cases) found in all argument, forensic, epideictic, and deliberative. Quintilian uses it as a value of style as well; he is the first writer on rhetoric to do so. Augustine's older contemporary, the rhetoric master Fortunatianus, repeats these classifications—they are standard in the late ancient manuals. Alcuin also repeats the standard ancient classifications of possible types of cases: *honestas*, *admirabilis*, *humilis*, *anceps*, *obscura*. These all relate to the way in which a case may be perceived by the judging audience—they are not inherent qualities. And they reflect attitudes, habits, conventions, and prejudices of the sort assumed by the orators themselves to be at work in all proceedings that required their auditors to make some choice, judgement, and decision.

A word is known and enriched by the company it keeps. The four other classifications of cases are each described as deviations from a norm, as matters strange, puzzling, debased, even monstrous. It is difficult to convey, in modern English, the ancient sense of *admirabilis* here (for us a wholly positive moral quality), but in this context 'shocking' would be a possible equivalent, perhaps even 'disgusting', for *turpis* is used for this category instead of *admirabilis* by the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. An example of *causa admirabilis* might be Cicero's account of the shocking charges of incest and impiety as well as murder and rape against the patrician Publius Clodius in his oration *pro Milone* (52 BCE), a text well studied in medieval rhetoric. A *causa humilis* is trivial, mean, and distinctly lower-class—the territory now of urban night courts and television judges. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* lists only one more type, *causa dubita*, not

<sup>23</sup> Though Carolingian rhetoric (unlike Carolingian contributions to grammar and dialectic) remains relatively neglected by English-speaking scholars, Murphy (1974: 80–7), does pay it attention, though he attributes greater influence on the later Middle Ages to Alcuin's pupil, the encyclopedist Hrabanus Maurus (d.856). An important study of early Carolingian production is Holtz 1975, on a manuscript collection, now in Paris, of materials compiled in the late 8th century for teaching rhetoric and the other liberal arts at the abbey of Monte Cassino, a focus of cultural life which Charlemagne visited and patronized. Alcuin's rhetoric was copied widely, in whole and in excerpt; for example, his discussion of speaking well (delivery) had a long medieval afterlife in courtesy books: see Johnston 2006.

the best of situations to be in for a lawyer or debater trying to analyse a case. Writing at the same time (around 85 BCE), the young Cicero divided the 'doubtful' category in two: *anceps* ('ambiguous', literally 'two-headed') and *obscura* ('difficult'). For him these are negative values, the one describing cases which have both strongly positive and negative aspects, the other referring to those cases that the audience of judges will have a hard time puzzling out, and thus finding credible.

For the essential issue in any argument is credibility, that your cause be believable—at least more so than the alternatives—and that your audience can therefore be persuaded to do as you intend. Bene of Florence, we recall, defined the process of persuasion as a kind of path.<sup>24</sup> One's auditors are brought by the several means of persuasion to believe with confidence what your speech intends ('ad fidem persuasione ducatur'). 'Leading to belief' involves not just intellectual conviction but becoming emotionally 'warmed up', *incalescat*, through desire, *voluntas*. Quintilian noted a similar psychology when he observed that 'Proofs may lead the judges to *think* our Cause the better one, but it is [emotions] that make them also *want* it to be so; and what they want they also believe [*sed id quod volunt credunt quoque*].'<sup>25</sup> Persuasion involves an act of will, as Augustine also emphasized. Being persuaded is all about consenting to believe that something is true, not necessarily, but probably, reasonably, and likely so. And since rhetoric is concerned with social and ethical truths, not mathematical certainties (which need no persuasion), the confidence (*fides*) of the audience in what you are saying is crucial to their finding it credible enough to act on their belief (*fides* again) and in your favour.

In this process of coming to confident belief, it would be hard to overstate the role of class outlook, based in shared conventions, experiences, education, and habit. As a stylistic value, *honestus* reveals itself in its etymology. Sometimes translated as 'sensible', it is associated often in both classical and medieval writings with adjectives like 'open' (*apertus*) and

<sup>24</sup> Rhetorical delivery should strike a moderate balance so that 'concilietur auditor et ad fidem persuasione ducatur, ut animorum motibus incalescat' ('the listener may be amenable and be led to confident belief through persuasion, as he may warm up through the movements of his animate spirits') (Bene of Florence, *Candelabrum*, 8.58.3; 273). It is worth noting that the 'delivery' of which Bene speaks in this treatise is primarily of written letters, since his treatise concerns *dictamen*, composing persuasive written materials, rather than oratory per se. Even when not actually delivered aloud, the rhetorical advice about their presentation is imagined and modelled as though oral; of particular interest are comments found well into the later Middle Ages describing punctuation markings as indicative of various vocal tones, analogous to the neuming of hymns (for example, *Candelabrum*, 1.24; 31–2). On medieval rhetorical teaching concerning the oral delivery of letters, see Camargo 2010 and 1995; see also Ziolkowski 2007.

<sup>25</sup> 'Probationes enim efficient sane ut causam nostram meliorem esse iudices putent, adfectus praestant ut etiam velint: sed id quod volunt credunt quoque' (*Inst. orat.* 6.2.6).

'plain' (*clarus*). A 'causa honesta' is the ancient equivalent of the 'open and shut' or 'plain and simple' case of today. *Honestas*, however, is the good sense of those who have *honor*, the great and the good, not the *humiles*. Similarly, what is 'deviant' (the other four types of *causae*) is judged against the standard of an *honesta causa*. Needless to say, what constitutes honest behaviour and style has greatly altered over time and place, though it never seems to have lost its two chief characteristics: 'credibility' and 'good sense' (however those may have been understood in their particulars).

Quintilian, writing in the century after Cicero, understood *honestus* as a value of style, as well as a type of case (*causa*). The ways he uses the word suggest a somewhat different range of meaning than the Ciceronian ones, referred to more specifically aesthetic tastes. In discussing what he called *compositio*, the rhythmic structures of sentences, he says that all such prose composition should have three qualities: it must be 'honesta iucunda varia', honest, pleasurable, various.<sup>26</sup> In this passage, he gives no fuller explanation of what 'honest prose rhythm' might be, but a previous discussion is perhaps more fruitful. Book 8 of the *Institutio oratoria* is about Ornament or style, and while it is not Quintilian's only discussion thereof, it does lay out certain aesthetic principles that are the base for many more particular comments. In this book, he praises what he calls 'honestus ornatus', defined further as ornament which is made more worthy or appropriate (*dignius*) when 'varied in accordance with the type of subject': 'True beauty is never separated from usefulness. But it only takes a modest power of judgement to see this. What is more worth noting is that this honourable Ornament will itself acquire appropriateness by being varied in accordance with the type of subject.'<sup>27</sup> This comment is preceded by examples of such honest ornament, many drawn from gardening. The garden form called a quincunx, in which trees are planted in a square, with a fifth tree in the centre, is both beautiful to look at (*speciosus*) and also improves the irrigation and cultivation of each tree. Moreover,

If the top shoots of my olive bolt, I shall lop them with the knife, and it will fill out all round more handsomely and forthwith bear fruit on more branches. A horse whose flanks are compact looks better [*decentior*], but is also faster. An athlete whose muscles have been developed by exercise may be good to look at [*pulcher*]; he is also more ready for the fray.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'Compositio . . . debet esse honesta iucunda varia' (*Inst. orat.* 9.4.147).

<sup>27</sup> 'Nunquam vera species ab utilitate dividitur. Sed hoc quidem discernere modici iudicii est: illud observatione dignius, quod hic ipse honestus ornatus materiae genere variatus decebit' (*Inst. orat.* 8.3.11).

<sup>28</sup> 'Fugientia in altum cacumina oleae ferro coercebo; in orbem se formosius fundet et protinus fructum ramis pluribus feret. Decentior equus, cuius adstricta ilia, sed idem

And now I think we can understand more fully what an 'honest finial' is. It is fitting (*dignus, honestus*) but also 'beneficial' and 'fit for purpose' (*utilis*), and having both qualities, it is then pleasing and so it properly *deceat*, 'adorns', the building. And without displaying both these qualities, it would not be ornament. It would be either a nugatory frill or an undistinguished though serviceable element.

Quintilian's comments accord with the somewhat earlier (and now more famous) dictum of Horace that the artist is best whose work is both beneficial and pleasing (*utilis et dulcis*). They reflect a firmly held belief in antiquity, one which was equally mustered to justify 12th-century medieval art, vastly different as these cultures were. The marriage of benefit and pleasure in an artefact, Quintilian judges, makes it *honestus*, ornament which accords with the good sense of educated and honourable communities. In other words, it is 'in good taste', for one could translate *honestus ornatus* as 'tasteful ornament'. The primary appeal of Quintilian's judgement is not to a transcendent standard, but to 'common sense' and 'sound judgement' based in 'good taste' (of course that of the more educated and worthy, those who are *dignius*).

Thus a set of verbal congruencies comes into view: Ciceronian *honestus* and *utilis*, Horatian *utilis* and *dulcis*. And if one places these ancient value terms into a logical formula, one quickly perceives their common term, *utilis*. So, is there then any actual connection between *honestus* and *dulcis* in antiquity, or is this only a logical coincidence without historical, evidentiary support? Whatever there was is only implicit and undeveloped, suggested perhaps through *suavis*, the root concept in Latin *persuadere*. As a judgement of style and effect, *honestus* seems to be the ancient equivalent of our 'good taste'—what people 'of honour' judge worthy (*honestus*) and beneficial (*utilis*). Their judgements result from being persuaded by the pleasure (*suavis*) and fittingness (*dignus, decorum*) of the art as well as its general benefit (*utilis*).

There seems little doubt that the post-medieval concept of Taste plays much the same role that *honestus* did in judgements about ornament and style before the 18th century. Recall that medieval Latin *honestare* meant 'to ornament, adorn', and that *honestus* had a strong connection not only with ethical behaviour but with style. In his preface 'On Taste', Edmund Burke concludes that 'taste' in art is not a matter of sensation alone but of judgement, based in education and experience, the shared 'good sense' of those rational and honourable men who had the same background as he did:

velocior. Pulcher aspectu sit athleta cuius lacertos exercitatio expressit, idem certamini paratior' (*Inst. orat.* 8.3.10).

Whilst we consider Taste, merely according to its nature and species, we shall find its principles entirely uniform; but the degree in which these principles prevail in the several individuals of mankind, is altogether different as the principles themselves are similar. For sensibility and judgment, which are the qualities that compose what we commonly call a Taste, vary exceedingly in various people. From a defect in the former of these qualities, arises a want of Taste; a weakness in the latter, constitutes a wrong or a bad one . . . The cause of a wrong Taste is a defect of judgment. And this may arise from a natural weakness of understanding . . . or, which is much more commonly the case, it may arise from a want of proper and well-directed exercise, which alone can make it strong and ready. Wherever the best Taste differs from the worst, I am convinced that understanding operates and nothing else; . . . It is known that Taste . . . is improved exactly as we improve our judgment, by extending our knowledge, by a steady attention to our object, and by frequent exercise. (Burke, 'Preface on Taste')

Even still for Burke, Taste largely consists in those shared habits, opinions, and customs ('similitudo morum'), which Cicero characterizes as also constituting the most joyous of friendships ('iucundissima amicitia').<sup>29</sup> While one may give an abstract definition of Taste, Burke implies that such an effort is intellectually wasteful, since having 'a taste for' something particular remains highly individual, as 'sensibility and judgement vary exceedingly in various people'. Good and bad taste remained for Burke aesthetic criteria based in judgements that depend largely on what is considered worthy (*honestus*) among honourable friends.

The linking of *honestus* with *dulcedo* and *suavitas*, in particular with the 'sweetness' of verbal persuasion, is evident in Cicero's treatise 'On friendship', *De amicitia*. The best friendship is characterized by *causa honesta*, the 'first law' of friendship being that we seek only what is honourable (*honestus*) from our friends and that our dealings with them are as though in a *causa honesta*, prompt, honourable, frank, open, and even stern if need be. Cicero underscores the nature of friendship as honest talk, more than as doing favours for one another. Like society in general, friendships are rhetorically energized and structured:

True therefore is that notable saying of, I believe Archytas of Tarentum, which I heard recalled by our elders who heard it from other elders, 'If someone should ascend to the heavens and behold the nature of the world and the superlative beauty of the stars, that wondrous sight would be to him displeasing; which would have been the greatest pleasure, if he had had

<sup>29</sup> '[E]stque ea iucundissima amicitia, quam similitudo morum coniugavit' (Cicero, *De off.* 1.58).

someone to talk to about it.' Thus nature loves nothing solitary and always strives for some support, which is sweetest from one's very best friend.<sup>30</sup>

The symposium occasion, so central to rhetoric, remained at the heart of friendship in medieval monasticism as well as in antiquity, characterized by the alliance of *honestus* with *dulcis*, in both behaviour and speech.<sup>31</sup>

*De amicitia* was a popular text in monasticism from Ambrose and Augustine; it remained a key text in the later medieval academy.<sup>32</sup> Supportive, loving friendship is characterized as 'dulcis honestas' in a comment from around 1100 on the relationship of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.<sup>33</sup> The 12th-century Cistercian, Aelred of Rievaulx, whose 'On Spiritual Friendship' is consciously an homage to and extension of Cicero's text, characterized true friendship in Ciceronian terms as combining *honestas* and *suavitas*, *voluntas* (as 'good-will') and *dulcedo*: 'And so in friendship are joined honour and charm, truth and joy, sweetness and good-will, affection and action.'<sup>34</sup> While none of these contexts are specifically about experiencing human artefacts, the ostentatiously 'ancient' adage cited by Cicero emphasizes a core value of aesthetic pleasure. No art is truly enjoyable alone. To be *dulcis* aesthetic experiences must be shared with at least one good, 'honest' friend, who has your tastes, your good-will, your trust. Trust is essential to successful persuasion, as both *benevolentia* and *fides*.

Medieval Christians, clerics and nobles alike, did not lose sight of these essentially rhetorical virtues. Stephen Jaeger has demonstrated how the Roman social values of *urbanitas*, *elegantia*, and *iucunditas*—wit and

<sup>30</sup> 'Verum ergo illud est quod a Tarentino Archyta, ut opinor, dici solitum nostros senes commemorare audivi ab aliis senibus auditum: "si quis in caelum ascendisset naturamque mundi et pulchritudinem siderum perspexisset, insuavem illam admirationem ei fore; quae iucundissima fuisset, si aliquem, cui narraret, habuisset." Sic natura solitarium nihil amat semperque ad aliquod tamquam adminiculum adnititur; quod in amicissimo quoque dulcissimum est' (Cicero, *De amicitia*, 88).

<sup>31</sup> Krostenko 2001 has demonstrated how the Roman rhetorical virtues are rooted in concepts of friendship, specifically in an ideal of 'table talk', even when the actual occasions of rhetoric were those of a public forum. Such stylistic virtues as *urbanitas*, *iucunditas*, *elegantia*—wit, agreeableness, elegance—are all dependent on shared manners, conventions, and education.

<sup>32</sup> This influence in monastic thought and social mores has been traced at length by McGuire 1988. It is also central to the mores of medieval court cultures: see Jaeger 1985 and 1994, and Bond 1995.

<sup>33</sup> In the Regensburg rhetorical letters, *Epistola* 10: 'Quanta delectatio, quanta iocunditas, quam socialis gratia, quam dulcis honestas inter Heliam et Heliseum erat' ('How much pleasure, how much joy, what kindly fellowship, what sweet *honestas* there was between Elijah and Elisha') (MGH, *Epistolae Kaiserzeit*, 5.327.16). The comment is directed to 2 Kings 2:11–15.

<sup>34</sup> 'Quocirca in amicitia coniunguntur honestas et suavitas, veritas et iucunditas, dulcedo et voluntas, affectus et actus' (Aelred of Rievaulx, *De amicitia spirituale*, 2.20.143).

agreeableness—were cultivated in medieval courts. These are virtues of friends at table, the values of symposium and of that communal feasting that is praised still by Bernardino Gómez Miedes and indeed by Castiglione in *The Courtier*. They are values that are equally monastic, clerical, and aristocratic throughout the Middle Ages, essential in judgements of styles both social and aesthetic. They are not absolutes, not transcendent norms or ideals. *Urbanitas* is a quality that entirely derives from a distinct social group, the ‘city folk’ (or courtiers), sophisticated, cultivated people who ‘get the jokes’—the opposite of rural and barbarian, rustic and unkempt. *Iucunditas* is an essential monastic virtue, as Aelred emphasizes by linking *iucunditas* with *veritas* in his praise of friendship. It is a word much used in clerical works, authorized from its use at the start of Psalm 132, ‘Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum’ (‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity’). *Elegantia* derives from a root meaning ‘choice’, making an educated selection of the best and most precise word or motif, appreciated by one’s equally cultured social peers. None of these values can be predicated of objects in any measurable way. *Elegantia* also is often allied with *eloquentia* in both ancient and medieval contexts, associated particularly with charmingly persuasive verbal choices. In a well-known comment on Psalm 94:7, ‘We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hands’, Augustine called attention to the particular elegance of this metaphor: ‘See how elegantly [the Psalmist] turns the order of the words, yet does not render it peculiar.’<sup>35</sup> The common definition of rhetorical elegance required that one’s language choices be educated and readily understandable (‘pure et aperte’) throughout.<sup>36</sup> Stylistic obscurity held many virtues for a Christian exegete, but elegance was not one of them.<sup>37</sup> Elegant speech is artful yet also can be comprehended without special training.

<sup>35</sup> ‘*Nos autem populus pascuae ejus, et oves manuum ejus*. Vide quam eleganter verborum ordinem commutavit, et tanquam non propria reddidit, ut ipsos intelligamus oves qui sunt et populi’ (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 94.par. II; CCSL 39). Though a metaphor, the language is clear; we do not need special, even proprietary, knowledge to understand it. The word *propria* when used in a similar context in *Rhet. ad Her.* means ‘jargon’; see 4.12.17: *propria* words are not those ordinarily educated people understand and they are thus not ‘elegant’.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.12.17: ‘*Elegantia* est quae facit ut locus unus quisque pure et aperte dici videatur’ (‘*Elegantia* makes each and every topic seem to be expressed with purity and perspicuity’). The treatise’s author defines these features further as *latinitas*, ‘educated usage’, and *explanatio*, or ‘clarity of language’. Immediately following this discussion he speaks of their opposites, the faults of barbarism and solecism. Caplan, the Loeb translator, renders *elegantia* here as ‘Taste’; I have left it untranslated, given the focus of my chapter.

<sup>37</sup> Though used a few times in the Vulgate, *elegans* there refers to physical beauty, ‘comeliness’, not to artistic style. An English derivative is not found before the 15th century.

So all three of these qualities of style—*urbanitas*, *elegantia*, *iucunditas*—are rhetorical in their values; they are judgements about works as affording delight and benefit to a particular group and occasion. They are each important aspects of the Ciceronian criterion of *honestus et utilis*, joined with *dulcis/suavis* in defining persuasiveness. These qualities all accord with Burkean definitions of aesthetic taste as reflecting educated sensibility, so clearly a notion and practice of artistic judgement, judgements about styles of the sort that the neoclassical 18th century called Taste, was also active in medieval educated cultures. We cannot say, as has sometimes been claimed, that medieval thinkers had no conception of artistic pleasure apart from moral teaching, that all their poetic making was ethical in the strictest, most puritanical sense, that it valued only theological obscurity and disapproved elegance and witty play. Successful medieval art is *honestus et dulcis et utilis*.

### TASTY WISDOM

Yet none of these classical and courtly virtues have to do with biological *gustus*, the sensations of human taste. So the question, ‘Why elevate taste instead of another of the senses more associated with judgement in classical thought?’, remains unanswered. Human taste was analysed, in the Aristotelian tradition as we have already seen, as the most individually varying of all the senses. Appetites are not the same, even though ‘appetite’ as a concept (its ‘nature and species’, in Burke’s words) is as definite as any other abstraction. Aristotelian anthropology did recognize in taste an area of individuated experiences, which focused on the immediate sensations of *gustus* and bodily responses not subject to error. Therefore—as Aquinas recognized—such sensations as taste cannot in themselves be ethically right or wrong. Just because of that, judgement is not attributable to an appetite like *gustus* in pre-Enlightenment psychology. Yet it is also clear that, in medieval mystical and theological thought, the experience of ‘sweet taste’, as we saw in the last chapter, was given great complexity and even a certain rational character, through its association with wisdom. As an aspect of *sapientia*, medieval sweetness has the qualities of educability and judgement that Burke deemed necessary to Taste. The source of this tradition is not in Aristotle or in classical rhetoric but in the Hebrew Bible. Medieval thinkers used to advantage the pun in Latin *sapiens* and *sapor*, linking taste, especially sweet tastes, with knowing God, *dulcedo Dei*. Often too, such ‘sweetness’ was associated as well with rhetorical eloquence, both divine (especially in the obscure parts of the Bible) and in human compositions.

One readily finds such uses in some later medieval analyses of the so-called 'spiritual senses' (a more exact term might be 'mental senses'), the 'sensory' media by which divinity can be directly experienced in human life. An interesting, indirectly influential writer in this respect is the early scholastic, William of Auxerre (d.1231), whose extraordinary application of Aristotelian-based aesthetic psychology to mystical experience has been recently analysed by Boyd Coolman (2004: *passim*, but especially 27–49).<sup>38</sup> William's account insists that the human mind houses a sort of 'common sense' for these 'spiritual senses', analogues to the five corporeal senses and the 'common sense' of Aristotelian psychology. In the divine vision, 'to *intelligere* or to *videre* God is the same as to *audire* God, and to *audire* God is the same thing as to *olfacere* God, and to *gustare* is the same thing as to *tangere*, which is properly to have fruition of God'.<sup>39</sup> He attributes the basic idea of such spiritual senses, rightly, to Augustine, who, using a compendium of biblical texts for his authority, spoke of such senses. For example, further on in the sermon (number 159) on 'justified' (*licit*) pleasures, which we looked at in Chapter 2, Augustine says:

For above all desires, that is measured desires, justice is to be loved. For if you have spiritual senses, all those inner senses are delighted by the pleasure of justice. If you have inner eyes, look at the light of justice: 'For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light shall we see light' (Ps. 35:10). The Psalm says concerning that light, 'Enlighten my eyes, lest I fall asleep in death' (Ps. 12:4). Likewise, if you have inner ears, listen to justice. He sought such ears who said, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear' (Luke 8:8). If you have an inner nose, understand the apostle: 'For we are the good odour of Christ for God in every place' (2 Cor. 2:15). If you have inner taste, understand: 'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet' (Ps. 33:9). If you have inner touch, understand what the Bride sings of the Bridegroom: 'His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me' (Cant. 2:6).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The literature on the spiritual senses is vast, much of it indebted to the work of the modern theologians Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar. In addition to Coolman, see Rudy 2002, which focuses on later medieval German mystics, and Astell 2006. McGinn 1991–2005 provides an essential overview of the subject in four volumes; the first two are especially germane to the present discussion. It is important to keep in mind that the mystics' 'spiritual senses' are not at all the same thing as the 'inward senses' of medieval Aristotelian-Avicennan psychology.

<sup>39</sup> Coolman 2004: 157, translating *Summa aurea* 3. 41. 2: 'intelligere sive videre Deum idem est quod audire ipsum, et audire idem est quod olfacere, et gustare quod tangere quod est proprie frui Deo'. See also William of Auxerre's discussion of the five-in-one spiritual senses, especially *Summa aurea*, 4.18.3.

<sup>40</sup> 'Ergo prae omnibus voluptatibus, hoc est delectationibus etiam licitis, amanda est iustitia. Si enim habes sensus interiores, omnes illi interiores sensus delectantur delectatione iustitiae. Si habes oculos interiores, vide iustitiae lumen: *Quoniam apud te est fons vitae, et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen* (Psal. 35:10). De illo lumine dicit Psalmus: *Illumina oculos*

However, William discusses spiritual sensation in a manner far more in tune with the academic natural science of his day than with Augustinian method (though his main acknowledged doctrinal source is Augustine).

What is especially striking is how William of Auxerre emphasizes the human basis even of experiences of divinity. Since humans must know primarily through their senses, divine communications too must be fitted to human minds in order to be understood and experienced. Even visions are not unbridgeably extraordinary, though as intellectual experiences they tend to become sensorily multimodal (not limited to vision) as one works to imagine them. The way to contemplative vision lay through textual experiences of the sort discussed earlier as rhetorical *evidentia*, the evidences of faith brought forth before one's inner eyes and the rest of one's mental senses.<sup>41</sup> One sees this well in William's analysis of what he calls *gustus spiritualis*, which begins with ordinary mastication: 'When by faith we meditate upon these things which we know [about God], in a kind of chewing (*tanquam masticando*), we taste (*gustamus*) the sweetness (*dulcedinem*) of God.'<sup>42</sup> In a trope of long standing, meditation upon biblical and other divine texts was regarded as chewing, by reference to the practice of murmuring and moving the lips as one recited the words. Known also as *ruminatio*, its roots are in ancient composition as well as specifically in monastic practices. William gives it a particular Aristotelian turn by associating mastication in meditation with regular chewing and thus with taste, for chewing produced saliva (indeed even meditative 'chewing' does), and the flavours, such as sweetness, which make food into nourishment are activated only in the presence of saliva. No mere spiritual allegory, William firmly roots his *gustus spiritualis* in the letter of ordinary

*meos, ne unquam obdormiam in morte* (Psal. 12:4). Item si habes aures interiores, audi justitiam. Tales aures quaerebat, qui dicebat: *Qui habet aures audiendi, audiat* (Luc. 8:8). Si habes olfactum interius, audi Apostolum: *Christi bonus odor sumus Deo in omni loco* (2 Cor. 2:15). Si habes gustatum interius, audi: *Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus* (Psal. 33:9). Si habes tactum interius, audi quid sponsa cantet de sponso: *Sinistra ejus sub capite meo, et dextera ejus amplectetur me* (Cant. 2:6)' (Augustine, *Sermon* 159.4; PL 38.869).

<sup>41</sup> These disciplines as exercises in enriched visualization are discussed at length in Carruthers 1998. One should keep in mind that Latin *meditatio* translated Greek *meletema*, a 'training exercise' mental and physical, for athletes and philosophers both. In ordinary rhetoric *meditationes* usually referred to the products of school composition exercises, especially on a philosophical subject. Monastic meditation was a composition exercise (or set of exercises) focused on biblical texts; it has roots in Jewish practices, and similarities as well with the disciplined exercises of antique philosophy; see Hadot 1995 and Rabbow 1954.

<sup>42</sup> William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea* 4.18.3.3, 66–8: 'cum huiusmodi que per fidem cognoscimus meditatur, tanquam masticando, gustamus dulcedinem Dei', cited by Coolman 2004: 38. William uses the phrase *gustus spiritualis* (and also *tactus spiritualis*) in lines 14–15 of this section.

practice and human biology. And for William, as for many other later medieval spiritual writers, to 'taste' God is a more completely knowing experience than even to 'see' God. As Coolman has noted, the ladder of visionary ascent which William sketched begins with seeing (*videre*) and ends in *gustare* and *tangere*, which are—William says—the same thing (*idem est*), and constitute the particular enjoyment (*proprie frui*) of God. This inward-looking hierarchy inverts, as in a mirror, the ordinary hierarchy of the outward-looking senses. The experience is both *honestus* and beneficial (*proprie frui*), primary aesthetic values for both Augustine and before him, for Cicero and indeed the whole Roman rhetorical tradition.<sup>43</sup> I emphasize that these values derived not primarily from theological debate, though they are often so presented, but from rhetoric's necessary grounding in educated sensibilities and good judgement.

Similar efforts to ground the spiritual senses in the biology of physical sensations were made in the 13th century with respect to other senses, especially to visual sense. They arose from a desire to reconcile the new Aristotelian natural philosophy and somatic psychology with earlier medieval traditions of monastic contemplation and prayer, and to patch over the breach between the logically analytical method developed in the schools and the 'warmer', more affective practices of *lectio divina*. Both Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon attempted, with their theories of optical perspective, to base theological speculation at least partly in the physical characteristics of human vision and the psychology of sight. The later 13th-century Parisian theologian, Peter of Limoges, a younger contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, wrote a remarkable ethical treatise called 'A Moral Treatise on the Eye', which begins with a detailed account of the anatomy and physiology of human sight as the basis for his counsel concerning moral behaviour. The spiritual senses at this time seem to have been given a foundation far more elaborately biological than the early practical observations of monks that contemplation began in the activity of chewing texts. Masticating activity and hence taste of a kind had always been the road to contemplation.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Augustine famously discussed the objects of human desires in terms of 'use' and 'enjoyment', *utor* and *fruo*, in book 1.3–4 of *De doctrina christiana*. Though sometimes presented in translations as exclusive opposites, Augustine himself analyses them in human life more as mixtures of Ciceronian *honestus* and *utilis*.

<sup>44</sup> On Grosseteste and Roger Bacon's *perspectiva* theories, see Tachau 1988 and 2005. Denery 2005 and Akbari 2004 have both shown how these were transformed as theories of spiritual vision. Peter of Limoges's *Tractatus moralis de oculo* has been extensively discussed by (among others) Newhauser, who is preparing an edition of it for the CCCM. Newhauser's translation of the complete text of *The Moral Treatise on the Eye*, with introduction, notes and bibliography, is an excellent introduction to this important

A medical text from the 13th century (possibly by Urso), edited by Charles Burnett, makes a much more general claim for the greater discriminatory power of taste as the best of senses, including sight. As Burnett says, this opinion was clearly a minority one, but it is interesting as a claim for *gustus* specifically as a reliable guide for investigating plainly and completely ('plene et perfecte') the causes of natural things and their complexions (1991; anon., 'Summa de saporibus', pars. 9–10; cf. par. 5). This is a full reversal of the Aristotelian and Baconian position assigned among the senses to *gustus*. The writer claims that taste is superior even to vision, for using vision we can see only the outside of things, and our sight is prone to error because light varies so much and with it the aspect of things. But taste grasps the substances ('substantialia') of things. 'Therefore since with our taste we fully comprehend the natures of things, and taste understands savours, our treatise concerns savours'. These are the elemental complexions with which the trinitarian God (with the Son as Sapiencia) created all things 'from nothing', the elements (hot, cold, wet, dry) being God's first creatures.<sup>45</sup> Being able to grasp something's complexion is thus to understand its substance. Though the etymological connection of *sapor* and *sapientia* is not specifically invoked in this text, the link is obvious in the direction of its argument.

It seems quite clear that 'sweet taste' and 'moral worthiness' (to use a common modern translation of *honestus*) were brought together overtly and emphatically for the first time in medieval thought. Even though, as we have seen, rhetoric was known as *suauiloquens* from the beginning of the Roman tradition, any connection of rational persuasion and wisdom with a natural flavour realized through human saliva when chewing and swallowing is at best implicit, not evident. Sweetness of taste released by chewing is, however, strongly linked to wisdom and judgement in the Hebrew Bible. In the Bible, *sapientia* is 'sweet'—'sweeter than honey and the honeycomb', a trope much used in the Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and the Prophets. Wisdom (*Sapientia*) describes herself in the book of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 24:26–7: 'Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits. For my spirit is sweet above honey, and my

13th-century text. Monastic rumination as actual chewing is discussed by Leclercq 1961: 72–7, and Carruthers 1998: 202–12.

<sup>45</sup> 'Quoniam ergo gustu perfecte rerum naturas comprehendimus, gustus autem saporis percipit, de saporibus agamus' (Burnett 1991: 237, par. 15). The argument proceeds directly on to consider the creation of substances 'ex nichilo', which in trinitarian doctrine was identified with the Son acting as divine Sapiencia (Logos, Verbum). As Burnett says, the writer was evidently intent on wider claims than just the medical, though he did not in fact displace the more common claim made for vision as the primary sense.

inheritance above honey and the honeycomb.<sup>46</sup> So also in Psalm 18:11, the judgements of God are said to be 'more desirable than gold... and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb'.

By the time of Ambrose in the 4th century, the connection of *sapientia* with sweetness (*dulcis*) had certainly been made, and linked specifically to eating food. Commenting on the life of Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39:1–6), Ambrose curiously emphasizes that he was taken into the household of a chief cook, *praeposito coquorum*. (This is an old reading of the text; it was corrected in Jerome's Vulgate translation to 'a leader of the armies', namely the Egyptian general, Potiphar): 'Thus Joseph was sold, led into Egypt, and bought by the chief of the cooks. He was not a man of leisure [*otiosa persona*], who could cook the rawness of foods so that they might be feasted upon in their deliciousness by a faithful soul; not at all were knowledge and doctrine made sweeter by his foods.'<sup>47</sup> In other words, this Egyptian cook was no monk, no man of learned *otium*, who knew how to concoct the delicious foods of biblical wisdom by rumination and murmur and chant. It is an astonishing interpretative reach on Ambrose's part, I think, but it suggests that, like his young student Augustine, he was well acquainted with the ruminative habits of *lectio divina* and could consider it readily in terms of wholesome cooking. *Gustus* continued to play a prominent and quite literal role as a means of learning through the Middle Ages. Ottonian writers who were active in copying and translating classical texts of grammar and rhetoric also emphasized the sweet tasting of knowledge, using words deriving from *gustus*. So, around the year 1000, the monk Fromund of the Benedictine abbey of Tegernsee in upper Bavaria, recalls in a letter how his own abbot Gozbert, 'most pious pastor of faithful monks', engaged him to teach one promising brother among the young monks, 'hoping that I had swallowed a drop [*guttulam me sperans. . . degustasse*] of some small rivulet [of knowledge] in my flavourful mind [*sapida mente*]'.<sup>48</sup> And the influential Carthusian writer Guigo II (d. 1188) characterizes the four steps of contemplation in terms of chewing and digesting: 'Reading puts into the mouth a kind of solid food, meditation chews and breaks it up, prayer assumes its flavour, contemplation is the very

<sup>46</sup> 'Transite ad me omnes qui concupiscitis me et a generationibus meis implemini. Spiritus enim meus super mel dulcis et hereditas mea super mel et favum.' The trope is used frequently. Added authority for the sweetness of Wisdom (as the Son) came from Psalm 33, as discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>47</sup> '[U]enditus est ergo Ioseph, ductus in Aegyptum, emptus a praeposito coquorum. non otiosa persona, quae cruda ciborum coqueret, ut epularentur animi fidei suauitate; nullus enim cibus scientia et doctrina dulcior' (Ambrose, 'On Joseph', 4.9; CSEL 32.2).

<sup>48</sup> 'Gozpertus summae perfectionis amator, monachorum fidelium piissimus pastor, quendam fratrem vivida iuventute florentem commisit mihi ad docendum, alicuius rivuli guttulam me sperans sapida mente degustasse' (MGH, *Epistolae*, sel. 3, *Codex Froumond*, 1, epistola 8, 10.7).

sweetness that delights and revives. Reading is within the outer skin, meditation in the fat.<sup>49</sup> The Latin stresses physical chewing and actual eating, in keeping with monastic practice; this is no mere metaphor.

The focus on taste in medieval traditions has much to do, then, not only with textual authorities and metaphors, but even more with practices that focused on chewing and tasting. Meditation and liturgical practices made it impossible to treat tasting as just a manner of speaking. The doctrine of the Eucharist itself, especially as it developed in the late 11th and 12th centuries, insisted on understanding this biblical figure literally, as a manner of real chewing to taste the sweetness of God.<sup>50</sup> Others have ably traced the trajectories of this doctrine, culminating in the early 13th-century promulgation of the Corpus Christi feast, and the reformist reactions that followed. The idea that one was eating actual flesh rather than partaking in a symbolic remembrance of Jesus's sacrifice was contested not only in terms of grammatical and logical analysis but also in terms of taste. For there is such a thing as taste at work in the ideas we hold, as well as in our furniture and clothing. The fortunes of the doctrine of the eucharistic Real Presence are a good case in point. The 13th-century dogma of transubstantiation itself was something of a pulling back from the notion that actual flesh was being 'crushed by the teeth of the faithful', as an earlier formulation had it.<sup>51</sup> Transubstantiation held that while the elements were changed in substance they still tasted and were consumed 'accidentally' as bread and wine. For many in the reformed traditions, the idea that the communion elements are other than symbolic is distasteful; indeed, Roman Catholic doctrine was attacked by some reformers as a literally *disgusting* idea, a sort of cannibalism. To this day, American Presbyterians serve cubes of cheap white bread and supermarket grape

<sup>49</sup> 'Lectio quasi solidum cibum ori apponit, meditatio masticat et frangit, oratio saporem acquirit, contemplatio est ipsa dulcedo quae jocundat et reficit. Lectio in cortice, meditatio in adipe' (Guigo II, *Scala claustralium*, 3.43–7).

<sup>50</sup> The 12th- through 14th-century development of eucharistic doctrine along these lines is demonstrated well in Astell 2006; on eucharistic devotions focused particularly on the act of eating, see also Bynum 1992: 119–50. A summary overview of the doctrine's development is in Rubin 1991: 12–30. On the specific controversy between Berengar and Lanfranc in the later 11th century see Southern 1948, and especially Gibson 1978, which contains most of the essential texts.

<sup>51</sup> '[S]ensualiter . . . in veritate manibus sacerdotum tractari, frangi et fidelium dentibus atteri' (Gibson 1978: 81, citing Lanfranc's polemical 'Liber de corpore et sanguine Domini', PL 150.405–42, at 411). Medieval unbelief (not alternative belief, but actual disbelief or scepticism) was often expressed in terms of *distaste*: see examples in Arnold 2010. Meditation and physical eating are linked in multifarious ways, a central concern of some late medieval mystics, as described by Bynum 1987, and many other scholars since. At the level of basic human biology, this does not seem to have been exclusively a gendered matter, for men and women were sceptical or enthusiastic in equal numbers.

juice as communion elements, aggressively asserting their unchanged ordinarieness by means of the common way they taste. Contrariwise, the Catholic dogma is served by the accidentally ordinary taste of the special bread and wine, which tests faith in Real Presence through bold paradox and striking—even shocking—oxymoron. Whether and how far one can stomach the paradox is clearly a matter of faith but also, I think, of taste.

Coincidentally with 12th-century doctrinal developments—the Aristotelian-influenced rethinking of the spiritual senses and the renewed analysis of eucharistic doctrine—taste and wisdom were even more closely joined than they had been by a newly fashionable learned etymology. This derived *sapientia* from the phrase *sapida scientia*, ‘flavourful knowledge’. Of course depending on the long-established tropes linking wisdom and judgement to honey, this etymology insisted yet more specifically than ever that wise judgement is a savoury form of reasoning, combining sensibility and logic. Perhaps of Carthusian and Victorine origin (or at least revival), it enjoyed considerable success in the later 12th and 13th centuries.<sup>52</sup> It is invoked in *The Ladder of Monks* by Guigo II, the ninth prior of the Grande Chartreuse; in a sermon of Walter of St Victor (d.1180); in Adam of Dryburgh’s ‘Four-Part Exercise for the Cell’ (dated to 1190), written after Adam had joined the English Carthusian house at Witham;<sup>53</sup> and in the 13th century, in work by William of Auxerre, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas.

Guigo makes it clear that *sapida scientia* is a superior kind of knowing:

‘They [i.e. schoolmen] perished in their own ideas’ [Rom. 1:21], and ‘all their wisdom was swallowed up’ [Ps. 106:27], that wisdom to which the study of human learning had led them, not the Spirit of wisdom who alone grants true wisdom [*sapientia*], that sweet-tasting knowledge [*sapida scientia*] that rejoices and refreshes the souls in which it dwells with a sweetness beyond telling.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> It is striking that the etymology appears quite suddenly with the monastic reformation of the later 12th century and flourishes rapidly. I could not find it in Hugh of St Victor’s works nor in Bernard of Clairvaux. So it may have been invented (or recovered) by Guigo II, and then disseminated from the Carthusians to other reforming orders such as the Victorines. Though Guigo uses it to criticize the logical methods of the university as too narrow and inhuman, within a century it had been fully adopted within the university, as the use of it by Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas attests.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Sapientia sane nonne sapida scientia est?’ (Adam of Dryburgh, *Liber de quadripartito exercitio cellae*, 17; PL 153.830); on the Carthusian provenance of this treatise see Hogg 1989. At Witham, Adam became a friend of Hugh, its third prior, who also was a friend of Guigo II. This Hugh was made bishop of Lincoln soon after Adam’s arrival, the great St Hugh of Lincoln who rebuilt Lincoln cathedral.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis, et omnis eorum sapientia devorata est, quam eis contulerat humanae studium disciplinae, non Spiritus sapientiae qui solus dat veram sapientiam, sapidam scilicet scientiam, quae animam cui inest, inestimabili sapore jocundat et

In this comment, Guigo's target is the schoolmen of the early university, those dry logicians and cold reasoners who in their arrogance attacked monastic life and learning. The Latin tradition had long recognized a distinction between *scientia* (ordinary knowledge) and *sapientia* (wisdom, which is a higher knowing, including philosophy and divinity)—the distinction is found in Cicero.<sup>55</sup> But for Guigo, true wisdom is characterized not so much by the content and breadth of one's knowledge, but more by the way in which one knows, both the method by which one knows and one's attitude towards what one knows. Being *sapida*, wisdom is a complete experience and not just an abstract idea or a dry fact. A wise person also recognizes that it comes ultimately from God. Walter of St Victor underscores this same idea, but with a significant focus. For Walter emphasizes that theological wisdom must be pleasurable, acquired and kept with delight (*cum dilectione*). That pleasure provides divine science with its necessary *sapida*, he says: 'Nor indeed is just any idea called wisdom, but a thought about God; nor just any thought about God, but only that which is achieved with pleasure. This alone is rightly called "sapientia", that is flavourful knowledge.'<sup>56</sup> Thomas Aquinas confirms this tradition. Unlike most ordinary natural knowledge (*scientia*), theological wisdom is not just abstracted into a concept. It is particular and experiential, a *notitia experimentalis*. 'This', Aquinas says, 'is properly called *sapientia*, that is *sapida scientia*', knowledge with flavour:

Thus Augustine plainly says (*De trin.* iv, 20): 'The Son is sent, whenever He is known and perceived by anyone.' Now perception implies a particular experiential knowledge; and this is properly called wisdom, as it were a flavourful knowledge, according to *Ecclus.* 6:23: 'The wisdom of doctrine is according to her name' [*Sapientia enim doctrinae secundum nomen est eius*].<sup>57</sup>

reficit' (Guigo II, *Scala claustralium*, 5.119–23). This work was popular well into the late Middle Ages, including vernacular translations.

<sup>55</sup> Cicero makes this distinction often, not only in his rhetorical works (for example, *Partitiones Oratoriae*, 78) but also in his moral treatises, for example, *De off.* 1.19.62, where he distinguishes between expertise (*scientia*) and knowledge applied with virtuous judgement (*sapientia*). His model is the distinction in Greek of *phronesis* and *sophos*. But nowhere does he allude to an agency of *gustus*.

<sup>56</sup> 'Non enim quaelibet cognitio dicitur sapientia, sed cognitio Dei; nec quaelibet cognitio Dei, sed illa tantum quae habetur cum dilectione. Haec enim sola recte uocatur sapientia, id est sapida scientia' (Walter of St Victor, *Sermones* xxi, sermon 3.110).

<sup>57</sup> 'Et ideo signanter dicit Augustinus quod filius mittitur, cum a quoquam cognoscitur atque percipitur, perceptio enim experimentalem quandam notitiam significat. Et haec proprie dicitur sapientia, quasi sapida scientia, secundum illud ecclus. vi, sapientia doctrinae secundum nomen eius est' (Thomas Aquinas, *ST Ia*, Q.43, a.5, resp. 2).

Yet *sapida* for Aquinas is somewhat different than what it is for Guigo II and Walter of St Victor. For them, the etymology emphasizes a divine sweetness that creates knowledge that nourishes by delighting the soul. Sweet pleasure for them is wholesome, a quasi-medical balance of body and soul, which is experienced as *suavis*, that 'sweetness' that confirms belief. Aquinas (with the acknowledged help of Augustine), who is focused in this passage on the Incarnation, emphasizes *sapientia* as an experienced, embodied human science, for the Son is Wisdom compounded with humanity, and so best knowable through human sensory experience (*sapida*) because only in the medium of sensory experience is knowing also persuasive. Aquinas recognizes here the importance not just of logical proofs, but the further step of human persuasion, that humans only believe what they can find credible—namely, knowledge derived through our perceptions, 'notitia experimentalis'. In this way, the Incarnation is 'fitting' for our human being—it has *decorum*. Aquinas seems here to be, in part at least, making a judgement about the Incarnation in terms of its persuasive style. Jesus joined *dulcis* with *utilis* and *honestus* for our ultimate delight and profit. Like a good orator, God speaks to his audience in ways they can warm to and confidently credit. As Augustine did before him, Aquinas seems to recognize that our tastes, our desires and appetites, are at work even in the ideas we hold, for we understand best what we have experienced, savoured, and known.

# 5

## Varietas

Glory be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Pied Beauty'

### VARYING AND VARIEGATED

Modern English has come to distinguish two meanings of formal 'variety', one a temporally successive 'variation' of feelings, moods, rhythms, and the like; the other 'variegation', or many separate colours, textures, savours, all experienced distinctly though at the same time within a single artefact. This is a relatively recent development in English, commonly found only after the late 17th century (*OED*, s.v. *variegated*). A similar distinction is found in ancient Greek, words with the root *poikil-* being used for 'variegated', particularly of colours as in embroidery (*poikilos* adj., *poikilia* n.), and *metabolē*, meaning 'change', for variation in feeling and mood, or opinion and belief.<sup>1</sup> But even by the time of Cicero, as a stylistic value *varietas* includes both meanings,<sup>2</sup> and, as this chapter will show, from late antiquity through the early modern period in rhetoric they were conflated to such a degree that variegation of stylistic colours and

<sup>1</sup> See Fantham 1988 for an analysis of how these terms were used in Cicero's *De oratore* and in the Greek rhetorics that preceded it. By Cicero's time, 'variation' and 'variegation' as features of style had already been both subsumed in Latin *varietas*. Fantham argues that this may have occurred by the time of Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor in Athens, and demonstrates that for Cicero certainly *varietas* included both meanings. Another most useful discussion is Desmouliez 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero's Greek contemporary, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, uses *metabolē* for the sort of variation that could also be termed *poikilia* ('On Literary Composition', 13, where he is characterizing 'beauty' (*kalos*) of style): Fantham 1988: 284–6. Latin has several words for 'variety', all deriving from the adjective *varius* (verb *vario*). In medieval Latin, *varietas* seems often to be preferred when speaking of style and aesthetic affects; *variatio* is the more general noun, but there are too many exceptions to make this a reliable rule.

flavours in artefacts was regularly linked causally to 'change' in affect and feeling.<sup>3</sup>

Like other medieval aesthetic terms, 'variety' is most often defined as a balance between two extremes: proper 'variety' is the mean between 'bland' and 'chaotic'. As a quality of style, it is most often positive, found with *dulcis*, *suavis*, and other stylistic virtues. But an obvious difficulty arises once one attempts to parse it more precisely. One group's 'pleasing variety' is another's chaotic grotesquerie or boring monotony. Cicero was accused in his lifetime of indulging in 'Asiatic' lushness instead of adhering to the limpid 'Attic' style of his predecessors, though within three generations he was held up as the model orator by Quintilian, and evermore afterwards. What constitutes variety changes, perhaps not so much in rationalized definitions of the concept, but in how it is experienced, how it makes sense aesthetically. Making sense of something is not the same thing as defining it only in words, for English 'sense' (like Old French *sens*) is used for the whole human complex of thought, feeling, and perception, that kind of knowledge which is based in sensory experience. Latin *varietas* resists single definition. It is best to think of it initially not as a concept so much as a word covering many degrees of experience along a continuum between opposites, 'too much' and 'too little'. The very imprecision of the measure is essential to its nature, for variety can never be only one thing.

In his rich ekphrasis (an example that is 'Asiatic' without any doubt) upon the Justinian basilica of Hagia Sophia (mid 6th century), the Byzantine historian Procopius described the coloured marbles and ever-opening interior vaults of the building:

All these details, fitted together with incredible skill in midair and floating off from each other . . . produce a single and most extraordinary harmony in the work, and yet do not permit the spectator to linger much over the study of any one of them, but each detail attracts the eye irresistibly to itself. So the vision constantly shifts suddenly, for the beholder is utterly unable to select which particular detail he should admire more than all the others.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Words from the Latin root *varieg-* (such as *variegatus*, *variego*) are surprisingly seldom used between the time of Ausonius (late 4th century) and the 16th century. In the LLT-A database there are only nine occurrences (there are a dozen in the PL, the discrepancy explained partially by editing preferences). It is likely that a variant reading of Psalm 44:10 helped maintain some use of *variega-* words, infrequent as they are, until the 12th century 'Paris' edition set the authoritative reading. The dominant medieval reading (and the authorized one) is 'circumdata varietate' ('surrounded by vari-coloured embroidery'), but a variant tradition reads 'circumdata variegata'. We will return to this verse later in this chapter; it became a favourite description of the beautiful variety of the Church, its peoples and its languages.

<sup>4</sup> Procopius, *De aedificiis*, 1.1.47–9. See the basic study of Byzantine aesthetic, Demus 1948, especially 34–5; more recently Elsner 2007. Procopius was described as *rhetor*,

As described, the harmony of the interior is understood to be produced by the way each detail in turn takes the beholder's eye around and through the building. Procopius says that the details led his eyes to constantly shift their gaze as new vistas opened up to him, as he moved about within the varying *ductus* of the building and its ornamentation.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the soaring vaults, the domes and arches, the coloured marble panels and columns also draw Procopius's admiring eyes:

One might imagine he has come upon a meadow with its flowers in full bloom. For he would surely marvel at the purple of some, the green tint of others, and at those on which the crimson glows and those from which the white flashes, and again at those which Nature, like some painter, varies with the most contrasting colours [*tais enantiotatais poikillei chroiaïis*]. (Procopius, *De aedificiis*, 1.1.59–60)

As this excerpt makes clear, variety is essential to *ductus*; indeed the variety of a work constitutes its *ductus*. The itineraries within any crafted work are marked out by the modes and colours of its style. Style tells us how we should 'go'—the English expression used by musical performers, knowing 'how the work goes', is apt here.<sup>6</sup> Style articulates, develops, and distinguishes a composition's disposition and arrangements, and is thus an aspect of what we now would call a work's internal 'logic' or 'argument'—but it encompasses a broader experience than what the word 'argument' now conveys.

A good place to start to understand medieval aesthetic *variety* is with its appearance as a canon of stylistic analysis in ancient rhetoric, as we find it defined in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. There we read that 'Dignitas est quae reddit ornatam orationem varietate distinguens' ('*Dignitas* is what makes an oration ornate marking it out with variety') (4.13.18); later the *auctor* defines successful 'ornateness' as possessing the qualities of *gravitas*, *dignitas*, and *suavitas* (*Rhet. ad Her.* 4.56.69).<sup>7</sup> *Suavitas* in this context

though some controversy exists over what education he might have had (Cameron 1991: 6–8, 19–32).

<sup>5</sup> The concept is readily applicable to other medieval arts than literature; see Crossley 2010 (on the architecture of Chartres) and Flynn 2010 (on the liturgical compositions of Hildegard of Bingen and the liturgy planned for Heloise), also Pentcheva 2011 (on the sonic colourations of Hagia Sophia).

<sup>6</sup> On stylistic figures as 'way-finders', see Carruthers 1998: 116–70. See also Binski 2004, a book specifically concerned to give rhetorical context to 12th- and 13th-century English architectural ornament.

<sup>7</sup> While the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was not directly influential on medieval rhetoric masters much before the late 11th century—and even then studied more frequently in northern Europe as a university subject than as a practical rhetoric—its advice articulates a basic teaching that was passed on through Cicero and Quintilian, and also Vitruvius and Horace and, in later antiquity, Martianus Capella and Cassiodorus, Priscian and Isidore. The particular treatise was not well known in antiquity, but the precepts it taught were

refers to persuasive delight; *gravitas* to 'weighty' subjects and arguments. *Dignitas* here and elsewhere is particularly associated by the *auctor ad Herennium* with *varietas*. *Dignitas* and *dignus*, its adjective, are related to the verb *decet*, used when something is gracefully and fittingly adorned. It has to do with notions of worthiness and suitability, a formal coherence presented with grace that gives its perceivers both pleasure and a sense of being internally 'right'. *Decet(-ere)* gives us, in English, both 'decorate' and 'decorum'. So for the *auctor ad Herennium*, *varietas* expresses the essence of that fitting adornment which is one of the chief means of rational persuasion. For as a means of persuasion, of itself style has agency, for it affects *someone* in ways channelled by convention and context. Someone is led, *ductus*, by those markers of style which set forth, *distinguere*, the work. This means as well that *dignitas*, 'suitableness', adheres not in any single element of style but rather in the relationship among them, their 'variety'. One thing all by itself cannot produce variety, and no more can it have aesthetic *dignitas*.<sup>8</sup>

When the *auctor ad Herennium* discusses the three types of style, the *genera orationis*, he says that each style acquires its *dignitas* from the use that is made of the rhetorical figures: 'Distributed sparingly they set the oration in relief [*distinctam . . . reddunt orationem*], just as colours do; if too closely packed together they set it awry [*obliquam* or *oblitam*]. But in speaking we should vary the type of style [we use], so that the middle succeeds the grand and the simple the middle, and then again interchange them, and yet again, so that by variety [*varietate*] boredom [*satietas*] is easily avoided.'<sup>9</sup> Here *varietas* is given a perceptual justification, defined this time in terms of its effect on the audience's feelings; without enough

through such other ancient authors. On the relationships among *ornatus*, *dignitas*, and *varietas* see also Lausberg 1973: pars. 257.2b–258, and pars. 538–9. On the medieval teaching of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* in Italy, including stylistic *dignitas*, see Alessio 2006, and his notes to his 1983 edition of Bene of Florence's *Candelabrum*.

<sup>8</sup> Bede understood that variation in a picture was a stylistic choice, the means of marking out its internal relationships. In a now famous passage describing a picture of the Temple he had seen in a pandect of Cassiodorus' Bible, brought to Jarrow from Rome by Benedict Biscop, Bede approvingly comments that drawing's varying colouration articulates the relationships of its overall structural plan: 'Sicque fiebat ut omnis structura templi pro graduum esset varietate rationabiliter distincta'; ('[Cassiodorus] did this so that the whole structure of the temple might be clearly articulated according to its plan through the variety of its relationships') (*De templo libri duo*, 2.28; CCSL 119A). Bede's comment was copied by Hrabanus Maurus in his commentary on the two books of Chronicles (Paralipomena), 4.2; PL 109.451.

<sup>9</sup> '[Q]uae si rae disponentur, distinctam sicuti coloribus, si crebrae conlocabuntur, obliquam [oblitam?] reddunt orationem. Sed figuram in dicendo commutare oportet, ut gravem mediocrem, mediocrem excipiat adtenuata, deinde identidem commutentur, ut facile satietas varietate vitetur' (*Rhet. ad Her.* 4.11.16).

*varietas*, an audience becomes satiated and bored. This effect is in addition to the formal (and equally practical) goal of marking or ‘distinguishing’ the composition. We might judge that the experience proffered through the artefact ‘makes sense’ as a whole (or fails to do so, because it produces formal confusion and/or sensory tedium). I linger over the precise mix of feeling and rational structure because the experience of *varietas* is fundamentally composed of these two elements together—aesthetic experience ‘makes sense’ as a complexion of formal qualities and sensory perceptions.

The noun *satietas* may be glossed further out of Cicero, for it connotes not just tedium, but fatigue and disgust, even an aesthetic kind of nausea, ‘too much’ of any single thing, no matter how good of itself. Cicero comments in his early *De inventione*, the ancient rhetoric best known directly through the whole Middle Ages,<sup>10</sup> that it is good to insert a joke, a tall tale, a terrible story, or an appalling incident into one’s speeches: ‘for just as satedness and disgust [*satietas et fastidium*] for food is relieved or soothed by a tangy or sweet morsel, so a mind weary of listening is renewed by astonishment or refreshed by laughter.’<sup>11</sup> This passage was commented on at some length by Marius Victorinus, who interpreted it as concerning how to renew the *benevolentia* of an audience weary of listening (*Explanationes in Ciceronis rhetoricam*, 81–2). As it was with Victorinus’s commentary that the *De inventione* was best known to the Middle Ages, this passage became particularly emphasized.

Especially at risk of satiety was the activity of *lectio divina*, monastic reading and meditation. The abbot Peter of Celle, author of the sensationally grisly image with which I began this book, of an ascetic butchering his flesh to sell it to God his customer, described how one should read the Bible with full engagement. For Peter, the act of reading begins in the human body. This principle is fundamental. The careful self-preparation he prescribes for meditation is like that of a master artist about to make a new work, as he readies himself mentally in his cell (a pun, referring to the ‘little room’ both in monastic architecture and in the brain). The experience of reading itself is, as Peter describes it, intensely emotional:

[T]ravel by your reading all the way to paradise and sigh over what was lost. Drink from the four rivers . . . Beware the serpentine suggestion, eating the forbidden fruit . . . Walk with God as Enoch did . . . Enter the Ark at the time

<sup>10</sup> The western medieval transmission of ancient rhetoric is a complex matter, one affecting the humanist ‘revival’ far more than has often been understood or credited. The essays, translated texts, and bibliography in Cox and Ward 2006 are a good place to start.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Nam ut cibi satiētas et fastidium aut subamara aliqua re relevatur aut dulci mitigatur, sic animus defessus audiendo aut admiratione integratur aut risu novatur’ (Cicero, *De invent.* 1.17.25).

of the flood when God is angry with you, stay hopeful in the shadow of God's wings [Ps. 56:2] until iniquity pass away. Like Shem and Japhet, hide your parent's error instead of laughing like Ham. In this manner with a deliberate but light step traverse the contents of this book, imitating the good deeds, avoiding the evil ones, interpreting what is obscure, retaining and committing to memory what is straightforward [*plana*] ... Then come to Exodus and be saddened by the entry into Egypt.<sup>12</sup>

Not only does the text evoke strong feelings, but they are deliberately made various, even contradictory. They are mixed entirely into the intellectual activities of reading—retention, recollection, and interpretation. These movements of reason and feeling together are essential not only to grasp the text's content—actually Peter doesn't much discuss exegetical content in this particular text—but to benefit fully from the health-promoting effects of the exercise, for body and soul together.

## TEARS WITH LAUGHTER

Peter of Celle's younger contemporary, Alan of Lille, a secular cleric working within a university milieu that was in many ways actively hostile to Peter's own monastic world, describes the nature of musical harmony, in his poem *Anticlaudianus* (written in the first half of the 1180s; Peter of Celle wrote two decades earlier).<sup>13</sup> His description of Musica takes the form of an ekphrastic 'picture' (*pictura*) of her monumental but yet active appearance, *pictura* being the literary figure he uses for each of the Liberal Arts (as did his chief source, Martianus Capella) in order to show memorably the chief subjects, activities, and subdivisions which each includes.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> These quotations are from different parts of Peter's discussion of how to read the Pentateuch: 'In hoc quoque libro [Genesis] grandiori passa lectionis ueni ad paradysum et suspira perditum, bibe de quatuor fluminibus ... caue serpentinam suggestionem, pomi uetiti comestionem ... Ambula cum Deo sicut Enoch ... Intra arcam tempore diluuii cum Deus tibi irascitur, id est *spera in umbra alarum Dei donec transeat iniquitas*. Absconde sicut Sem et Iaphet errorem paternum, non rideas sicut Cham. Ad hunc modum presso et suspenso pede continentiam huius libri decurre imitando quae bona et declinando quae male acta sunt, interpretando obscura, plana retinendo et memoriae commendando' (1946: 236.24–35).

<sup>13</sup> Alan of Lille 1973: 24–5. Sheridan, the translator, notes that the convention derives mainly from the early 5th-century Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, a Latin epic-philosophical poem that maintained its influence throughout the Middle Ages. Portraits of the Liberal Arts feature both in *Anticlaudianus* and in *Martianus*, though Sheridan apologizes that these 'may bore us' (34). On the rememorative and compositional use of such 'pictures' (*picturae*), which are pervasive in medieval graphic and verbal arts, see Carruthers 1998: 72–81, 171–220, and Carruthers 2005.

<sup>14</sup> The terms *pictura*, *descriptio*, and in some contexts *imago* and even *figura* can refer either to a verbal ekphrasis or to a graphic image—or possibly to both. Without confirming

These are woven into each figure's robes. Having summarized the qualities of cosmic and bodily harmonies (*musica mundana*, *musica humana*), he describes how human-made musical art also depends upon rationalized combinations of sound:

[On Musica's robe is shown] the reason [*ratio*] why a single voice does not produce all melodic and pleasing chantings [*cantus*] of sounds but a combination of voices, sound [that is] alike and unlike, different and the same, the whole both univocal and doubled, dissimilar and other [*alter*]; how the chant [*cantus*] having been altered, the music changes itself [*se mutat musica*], weaving laughter with tears, obligatory matters with games [*cum ludis seria texens*].<sup>15</sup>

A number of things in this passage are of interest. The basic idea, that pleasurable and melodic music is produced not through monotone but by harmony produced through variety—a combination of disparate voices sounding together—accords well with the common medieval understanding of *varietas*. But in addition to that sort of *varietas*, the best chant also varies its moods and weaves together, as in a colourful text or embroidery, laughter and tears, the obligatory and the playful. Particular kinds of music were associated with corresponding aesthetic effects, laughter and tears, playful joy and grave solemnity.

The stylistic program (as E. R. Curtius called it) of mixing *seria* with *ludus* or *ioca*, and tears with laughter, is a common ancient practice commended for oratory as well as used in drama and epic, and it remained so throughout the Middle Ages. Latin *seria* means 'serious things' in the sense both of 'not funny' and also of one's duties and offices, 'not play'.<sup>16</sup> In a verse that is much quoted by medieval authors, Virgil has his older shepherd, Meliboeus, say that he won't look after his goats but instead watch a playful song contest of the two younger shepherds, for 'I valued my obligations less than their play' ('posthabui tamen illorum mea seria ludo') (Virgil, *Eclogue*, 7.17). Late in the 16th century, the humanist

evidence from other sources it is often impossible to tell, unless there is an actual drawing to which the term clearly refers. It would seem that many medieval authors did not care as much as we do about this distinction.

<sup>15</sup> 'Que ratio cur omne melos dulcesque sonorum / Cantus non gignit uox una sed unio uocum, / Dissimilis similisque sonus, diversus et idem, / Vnicus et simplex, duplex, difformis et alter; / Quomodo mutato se mutat musica cantu, / Cum lacrimis risus, cum ludis seria texens' (Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, 3.426–31). My translation, understanding *cantus* as the chanted words of liturgy, which at this time were considered to have important sonorities of their own: chant melodies expressed and developed these, and at this time varied considerably with the habits of the particular locations of the liturgies. Latin *vox* means both 'word' and 'voice'.

<sup>16</sup> An essay with useful comments about the medieval *seria*–*ludus* connection (though mainly focused on Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas) is Burde 2010.

bishop Bernardino Gómez Miedes still uses *tragica* and *tragoedias* for the cold, grave (and, he says, very bloodthirsty) speech (*sal tragica*) which counters warm, sociable *sal genialis* (*Commentariorum de Sale*, 3.3; 154B). In medieval Latin, *seria* and its relatives also acquired the meanings 'serially' and 'methodically', things done in 'proper order'. 'Serious' in the present English sense is an early modern development, for medieval English used an Anglo-Saxon word, 'erñest' where we use 'serious'. Behind both meanings of Latin *seria*, and its common adjectival form *seriosus*, is the idea, which we looked at in Chapter 1, of play as activity that is variant from one's obligatory burdens. In art, *ludus* plays inventively with the ordinary orders and obligations of *seria*, but equally, one cannot recognize *ludus* in art without *seria*.

Curtius's chapter on 'Jest and Earnest in Medieval Literature' discusses the long life of this trope, through many transferences and alterations in various genres of Latin and vernacular literatures (1953: 417–35).<sup>17</sup> Curtius's analysis is based in the categories of genre—comedy, hagiography, epic, and so on. But this is not the only way to consider the trope's longevity and popularity. The phrase 'turn what is serious to play' (*vertere seria ludo*) is from Horace's *Art of Poetry* (225), a work much commented on in the 12th-century schools, but well known earlier too, directly and from being quoted in other works. Horace discusses it in terms of varying the moods of an audience. Yet the close mutational link of tears and laughter, one turning into the other, has also in antique medicine a physiological base, described by Gregory of Nyssa among others. Both actions were considered to be primarily warming, sanguine in effect. 'Tears are like blood in the wounds of the soul', says Gregory of Nyssa; hot, moist, and restorative of cold, deadened, scarred flesh.<sup>18</sup> Tears and laughter medically are mirror actions, Gregory says, and each has a purgative effect. Thus each action is potentially restorative of the sweet accord, *eucrasia*, of health.

Tears are not produced in the heart (as some authorities held), Gregory argues, but by a different physiological process. Tears and laughter both begin with an act of perception and a resulting mental image (*phantasm*). Mental phantasms, we recall from Chapter 2, are composed of both a likeness and an affective 'intention'. This gives phantasms some agency, as they can directly cause bodily change, *adfectus*, in some particular way(s), as well as serving as the materials of thought. Their strong action upon the

<sup>17</sup> See also Olson 1982. Literary scholars for a long time have focused on alternating seriousness and comedy, particularly in medieval vernacular works.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio fúnebris de Placilla* (PG 46.880), cited in Hausherr 1982: 172.

whole body is apparent in Gregory's account of tears. An image intending to grief causes the entire body to contract and close its cavities and pores, thereby compressing all the interior organs. The lungs and respiratory tract are compacted, and naturally react by drawing violent breaths, which are emitted through the mouth as groans and shrieks. The compressed *vas bilis*, or bile duct, pours its bitter juices on the entrance to the stomach, which contracts further in pain. Bodily moisture is thus pushed out and up into the head and accumulates in the brain's cavities. Then ducts at the base of the brain drain into the eyes, and, pushed out through the eyelids, the moisture falls as tear drops. Laughter is just the opposite motion. As the body reacts to an image intending delight, it relaxes with pleasure, its pores and cavities expand, drawing extra air into the lungs and the interior of the body. All the interior organs, 'by a certain agitation and throbbing motion', expel the increased air through the mouth, which widens, 'extending the cheeks on either side round about the breath; and the result is called laughter [*gelos, risus*]'.<sup>19</sup> In this way laughter opens and also purges the lungs and other organs, increasing warm blood and counter-acting melancholy.

Bishop Gómez Miedes gives a more detailed account of the physiology of laughter, though one mainly in accord with Gregory of Nyssa's. Perhaps, says Bernardino, we may perceive something lovely and delightful, which warms up the heart (by nature warm and moist) as its mental image excites us to feel wonder and desire. This heat or vapour as it builds up suddenly bursts from the heart through the nerves of the diaphragm, and the sides and ribs to which it is attached. The outflowing vapour tickles (*titillare*) all these organs, setting them in motion. This tickling expands the arteries and veins, and the mouth, as well as distending the face and closing the eyes. All these organs swell with the motion of the vapour until it passes out through the mouth as a laugh. 'In this way,' Bernardino observes, 'the mind is opened up by laughter.'<sup>20</sup> A rib-tickling laugh is healthy too, warming and renewing the heart and blood, purging bile (bitter and cold) and curing melancholy.<sup>21</sup> Laughter purges and

<sup>19</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio* ('On the creation of humans'), 12.4–5 (PG 44.159–60). My quotations of this text are from the English translation in the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, though the French translation in the Sources chrétiennes series is a preferable guide to the Greek. All modern translations are hampered by the continuing lack of a contemporary critical edition of this work. The Latin translation printed in the PG is that of Dionysius Exiguus (6th century). The text was also translated by Scotus Eriugena (9th century).

<sup>20</sup> 'Vnde in hunc modum per risum patefacta mens' (Gómez Miedes, *Commentariorum de Sale*, book 3, 53; 1572 edn, 210–11, at 211B). See also his remarks in book 3, 2–3 (154–5).

<sup>21</sup> The health benefits of laughter are still medically noted, especially from vigorous laughing; see 'Scientists Hint at Why Laughter Feels So Good', *NY Times* (13 Sept. 2011),

restores the body's *pneuma* or energetic 'spirits'. Laughter's tears also open and purge the brain, washing through it to restore moisture and heat (for the brain is cold and dry).<sup>22</sup> These doctrines continued to be known through medieval medical teaching: collections of medical lore, taught in the 12th century and later at Paris and elsewhere, give similar accounts of the genesis and effect of tears and laughter. Changing laughter to tears, in all these accounts, is not a particularly difficult thing to do—indeed there may be more difficulty, in some circumstances, in telling them apart (as we have all observed).

Tears are physiological affects which, in this psychology, need not be identified with any specific emotion or inward state. In writings about ascetic prayer, tears are not necessarily expressions of sadness, nor indeed of any particular emotion. Sadness as melancholy, *tristitia*, is one of the eight sins of the desert monks, along with *acedia*, tedium. Tears can accompany any number of different emotional states, including joy—hence the monk can look happy yet inwardly groan, or weep but be inwardly joyful. Similarly, there is destructive laughter, occasioned by anger and spleen, and warm, sociable laughter, promoting both comity and digestion. Monks were cautioned against immoderate laughter because it imperilled the community's silence, but gaiety (*hilaritas*) is a virtue.<sup>23</sup> One result of the dominant medical analysis of the phenomena of laughter and tears is to make them ambiguous as psychological or emotional symptoms, for one can assume tears for bad as well as good purposes. Like laughter also, tears can be induced by artifice and they can be feigned. For it is not the tears themselves that are good or ill, but the actions that, like other emetics and purgatives, they may enable. Tears are a sign of emotions rather in the way that a successful enema is a 'sign' of returning health—as an agent or instrument rather than an infallible symptom. Just as laughter is induced by jests and jokes, tears can also be by words, pictures, or physical postures. The rhetorical manuals are filled with counsel about methods for doing this, and so is medieval advice on meditation.

reporting studies that belly laughing releases endorphins (which accompany pleasurable feelings) and promotes social cohesion.

<sup>22</sup> Compare Lawn 1979: N56, 309–10. In addition to constriction as one general cause of tears, an alternative cause in this version, and several others published by Lawn, was that excess bodily humidity could cause the dryness of the brain to melt in tears. There is a persistent uncertainty, at least from Aristotle onwards, as to whether the brain is basically dry or wet; a similar ambiguity persists concerning melancholy. The text in Lawn's edition is the longest medieval medical treatment of the matter, in a work called *Questiones Alani* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS Lat. 18081, fos. 210v–227), thought to be at least in part the work of Alan of Lille.

<sup>23</sup> See the further discussion in Carruthers 2006a and Nagy 2000.

In some ancient and medieval physiology, kneeling and tears were thought to be directly related, because of the folded position of the embryo *in utero*, in which the knees, curled up touching the head, form from the cheeks. The word for knees, *genua*, Isidore of Seville says, is from that for cheeks, *gena*, because of this biological formation. At the same time the eyes are forming, but the folded knees cover them, so that the embryo is blind. The round and recessed shape of the eye sockets results from this embryonic position. When a baby first unfolds as it emerges from the womb, the eyes are revealed behind the knees, weeping but also able to see. And so it is that, when people fall down on their knees, they at once begin to weep (*Etym.* 11.108–9, citing Ennius).<sup>24</sup> This bit of medical lore was commonly assumed. For example, in a 12th-century treatise on prayer gestures and procedures, a posture of prostration is described (identified as the seventh prayer mode in this treatise), in which the individual is bent all the way over, with the knees and feet touching the floor *more camelorum*, ‘in the manner of camels’.<sup>25</sup> The elbows are also on the floor, but not the face, so that the individual puts full weight on the knees and the elbows. This posture was regarded as especially difficult; Peter the Chanter says there is no biblical authority for this position, but that it was a posture practiced by Gregory the Great’s aunt, St Tarsilla, and on that authority Peter admits it to his treatise. This posture places great strain on the lungs and the stomach, similar to the gut-wrenching that produces tears. The other more common posture of prostration, lying fully prone on the stomach and chest, face down on the pavement, also puts great strain on the stomach and lungs, squeezing them and thus squeezing out even more liquid as tears. Peter emphasizes how these postures are especially productive of tears, quoting St Benedict’s comment that effective prayer is when ‘we know ourselves to be heard not in many words but in purity and compunction and devotion of heart and in an effusion of tears’.<sup>26</sup> And he further counsels that prostrate postures are to be performed as one enters a church, murmuring ruminatively in medita-

<sup>24</sup> My thanks to Katie L. Walter for this citation; she has found it quoted in Bartolomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietate rerum*, and (translated) in late medieval English sources. It was also copied from Isidore in the 9th century by Hrabanus Maurus in his encyclopedia, *De universo*. See Walter 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Peter the Chanter 1987: 191, also 35–40.

<sup>26</sup> ‘De utilitate genuflexionum’ (Peter the Chanter 1987: 233); Peter understood *genuflexion* to be the prostrate postures for prayer. Gregory tells the story of how his aunt Tarsilla was buried with her knees bent ‘more camelorum’: because in life they were so accustomed to that prayerful (and embryonic, perhaps resurrective) position they would not straighten (Gregory the Great, *XL homiliae in euangelia*, book 2, sermon 38.15). The quotation is from *RB* 20: ‘Et non in multiloquio, sed in puritate cordis et compunctione lacrimarum nos exaudiri sciamus.’

tion and weeping. Mind and heart cleansed by tears, one can then beneficially enter the sanctuary.

Laughter was always considered the remedy for melancholic sadness. Summarizing and translating 'Gomesius' (Bernardino Gómez Miedes) as his authority, Robert Burton observes in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), that laughter is effective for melancholics because it produces 'an abundance of pleasant vapours, which in sanguine melancholy especially, breake from the heart, and tickle the midriffe, because it is transverse and full of nerves: by which titillation the sense being moved, & arteries distended, or pulled, the spirits from thence move and possesse the sides, veines, countenance, eyes.'<sup>27</sup>

## THE MONSTERS IN THE CLOISTER

Relieving tedium remained a chief justification for stylistic *varietas* in monastic meditation. In the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, employing a rhetorical commonplace, 'varietas tollit fastidium' ('variety relieves satedness').<sup>28</sup> *Tedium* is a pre-eminent monastic vice. In meaning, the word is a close relative of *satietas*, but where *satietas* can mean simply 'satisfied', *taedium* is always negative. It is boredom, but tending towards annoyance and disgust, the condition of *fastidium*, a word always meaning disgust or loathing. The desert monks introduced the Greek term *acedia*, defined in Latin as tedium, *taedium animi*. As *acedia*, *taedium* brings spiritual dryness, numbness of heart and of intellect. It is the 'noonday devil' of the desert contemplatives, an ever-present temptation for those whose task it was to pray continuously.<sup>29</sup> Evagrius says in his *Praktikos* that

the demon of *acedia*... is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all... he makes it seem that the sun barely moves... and that the day is fifty hours long... he constrains the monk to look constantly out the windows... he instils in the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred of manual labour. (Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, 12)

Evagrius's characterization of *acedia* passed to Latin monasticism through John Cassian's *Institutes*, where in translation it became if anything a more serious problem:

<sup>27</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, part 1, sect. 3, memb. 3; cf. *Commentariorum de Sale* 3.53 (154B).

<sup>28</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem*, 9.201; *SBO* 3.97.22.

<sup>29</sup> Cassian, *Monastic Institutes*, 10.1, notes that *acedia* was traditionally identified with the noonday devil (*daemonius meridianus*) of Psalm 90:6.

When depression attacks the wretched monk it engenders a loathing for his situation, dislike of his cell, and contemptuous disparagement of his brethren . . . It makes him desultory at any task to be done within the walls of his cell. He makes much of monasteries that are situated afar off, and talks about their more advantageous positions and healthier sites. He describes the community of brothers there, how friendly and how deeply spiritual they are; while in contrast everything to hand is disagreeable . . . He looks anxiously this way and that, unhappy because no brother is coming to see him; he goes in and out of his cell and continually looks at the sun as if it were slow in setting. (Cassian, *Monastic Institutes*, 10.2)

The role of *varieta*s in monastic art is thus a more complex and nuanced matter than one might think if one only read Bernard of Clairvaux's *Apologia* to William of Saint-Thierry.<sup>30</sup> Bernard's famous invective in that work, against installing carved monsters in the cloisters especially at Cluny, has produced many responses, not least from modern art historians, seeking to justify those very monsters. These modern justifications are all made in moral and/or pedagogical terms. Here is a typical one, commenting on the Romanesque capitals of the Cluniac monastery of Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa:<sup>31</sup>

[O]n a general level, the Cuxa capitals functioned . . . as stimuli to the active process of meditation. Seated on one of the benches within the colonnades [of the cloister], the monk would certainly be aware of the chaotic imagery of the capitals just above his head. There, if he were distracted from reading in books, as Bernard feared, the monk would find a concrete visualization of the phantasms, which drew in part on the monstrous creatures described in the psalms, but also more generally evoked his ongoing struggle against the Devil both in communal, liturgical prayer and psalmody and in private meditations. The very texts that the monks were reading in the cloister were often decorated with a similar repertoire of disturbing creatures. (Dale 2001: 428)

On this analysis, the vigorous scenes on the Cuxa capitals (like those at Moissac or at Vézelay) are to teach a monk to realize he must constantly struggle with the demons of his turbulent desires: 'the monstrous and deformed bodies in the cloister . . . served on the most basic level to remind the monk of the ongoing battle with the enemy' (Dale 2001: 427). I disagree. The goal of such fantastic creatures is not precept-based moral pedagogy. Rather their intention is aesthetic, to create particular

<sup>30</sup> Often cited as evidence for a strict Cistercian puritanism bordering on iconoclasm, this interpretation has been modified of late: see Rudolph 1990 and Carruthers 1998: 84–7.

<sup>31</sup> The monastery is near Prades, in Catalonia, on one of the pilgrimage routes to Compostela. Half the cloister sculpture is still *in situ*, the other half installed in the Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

sensory experiences. And what experience do they provoke, these scenes of vigorous demonic activity, in the context of claustral study or liturgical prayer? *Varietas*, in the form of laughter (ridiculousness) or fearfulness (devils' torments) or *admiratio* (wonder at what is strange) for the bizarre and unexpected (which the monsters provide). They surprise us—they did then, they do now. Their very diversity and discord shocks one from the temptation to *taedium*, and its companions, *fastidium* and *satietas*. These scenes depict a struggle with demons, to be sure—Evagrius's 'noonday devil' had become basic monastic idiom, together with the seven other 'demons' characterized in the *Praktikos*—but the figures are not basically a reminder of some lessons learned. They are not so conceptual. Those sculptures produce an immediate and positive *affectio animi*, 'affection of the soul', as it was known in medieval psychology. Thus, they do not represent a *possible* demonic struggle. They immediately relieve an *actual* one. Experiencing them in itself routs the noonday devil, for the variety they produce relieves tedium and refreshes a wearied mind. They may even strengthen the virtue of inner *hilaritas*, healing a dangerous sadness or melancholy.

So why is Bernard upset by their presence in the cloisters?

As has been noted often, Bernard's scorn in his *Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatum* is heaped upon the expense of the architecture—its *sumptuositas*. It is the symptom of vanity and avarice (two other of Evagrius's demons). Then at the very end of this chapter in *Apologia*, with the arresting hyperbole and chiasmic antithesis so characteristic of him, he turns to decry the beasts and monsters found in the cloister: fierce lions, filthy apes, a quadruped with a serpent's tail, a fish with an animal's head. Yet Bernard had a more complicated relationship with monsters than these words would suggest, one elegantly set out by Caroline Walker Bynum in her essay on 'Hybrids in the Spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux' (2001: 113–62). He is not opposed to monsters per se; indeed he famously called himself one, 'I am a sort of chimera of my age'.<sup>32</sup> He does oppose too much variety: 'So multiple, so eye-catching a variety of diverse forms appears everywhere, that they would rather read in the marbles than in codices, and occupy the whole day admiring this one thing than meditating upon the law of the Lord.'<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> 'Clamat ad vos mea monstruosa vita, mea aerumnosa conscientia. Ego enim quaedam Chimaera mei saeculi, nec clericum gero, nec laicum' (Bernard of Clairvaux, epistula 250.4.1–3 (addressed to Bernard the Carthusian); *SBO* 8.147); cf. Ps. 70:7 (Bynum 2001: 115–20).

<sup>33</sup> '[T]am multa . . . tamque mira diversarum formarum apparet ibique varietas, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus, quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando' (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia*, 12.29; *SBO* 3.106.21–4).

These are again the distracting works of the noonday devil, produced this time not through lack but through excess—*multa mira varietas*, plentiful and astonishing variety. This variational excess is what Bernard elsewhere calls *curiositas*. In ancient rhetoric also, excessive *varietas* was recognized as a fault, manifestly bad taste.<sup>34</sup>

Bernard often links such ‘curiosity’ with expensive display, *sumptuositas*, as he does in the *Apologia*. Hiring all those stonecutters to make complex historiated capitals offended him ethically. But his response is more complex. *Curiositas*, in monastic thought, causes inquietude and stirs strong desire—this is why it is the antidote to tedium. Restlessness and desire are not in themselves always bad experiences; Bernard understood this. In his treatise ‘On Loving God’ (*De diligendo Dei*), Bernard describes how the just will exult in God’s sight, ‘in sober drunkenness . . . burning for God’. ‘Here there is repletion (*satietas*) without disgust (*fastidium*): here insatiable curiosity without anxiety (*insatiabilis sine inquietudine curiositas*): here eternally constant and boundless desire not experiencing any lack.’<sup>35</sup> In an Advent sermon Bernard encourages his audience to question the mystery of Incarnation, using the familiar *circumstantiae* method of rational inquiry: *quis, unde, quo, ad quid, quando, qua*. Such curiosity, he says, is without doubt laudable and healthy.<sup>36</sup>

A search of the online ‘Patrologia latina’ suggests that *curiositas* was not a major concern of monastic writers before Bernard. Gregory the Great discusses *curiositas* only once in any detail, in a sermon on Luke 14:16–24, the parable of the reluctant dinner guests. Their excuses are misdirections of the mind towards worldly concerns, which produce misjudgements of the occasion to which they have been invited. The guests only understand their external affairs and do not search within themselves, and such concern with tangential matters is rightly called *curiositas*, Gregory says. But Bede, commenting on Mark 15:47 and Matthew 27:61, writes of the *pia curiositas* of the Marys during the events of the Resurrection, and of Abraham’s ‘human curiosity’ in continuing southwards into Egypt after, at God’s command, he had already moved to Canaan (Gen. 12:9–10). Alcuin, sending a letter together with a florilegal work to two pious sisters,

<sup>34</sup> Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* 8.3.56–8) lumps together all sorts of stylistic excess as *cacozelos* or *mala adfectatio*, ‘bad taste’; Demetrius identified a similar fault (see Chapter 3).

<sup>35</sup> ‘Hinc illa satiety sine fastidio: hinc insatiabilis illa sine inquietudine curiositas: hinc aeternum illud atque inexplebile desiderium, nesciens egestatem: hinc denique sobria illa ebrietas, vero, non mero ingurgitans, non madens vino, sed ardens Deo’ (Bernard of Clairvaux, *De diligendo Dei* 33; *SBO* 3.147.19–22).

<sup>36</sup> ‘[C]irca ea quae vere salutaria sunt sedula cogitatione versamini. Diligenter pensate rationem adventus huius, quaerentes nimirum quis sit qui veniat, unde, quo, ad quid, quando, et qua. Laudabilis sine dubio curiositas ista est et salubris’ (Bernard of Clairvaux, ‘Sermo 1, In adventu Domini’; *SBO* 4.162.2–5).

commends its contents to their curiosity about their reading materials (*curiositas legentium*).<sup>37</sup> There are other neutral or even positive uses of the word. But it is striking how little it figures before Bernard, and how much afterwards, and almost always in relation to *venustus* or style, whether found in the adornments of young men and women or of monumental church buildings.

Applied to style, *curiositas* can be analysed as a failure of *ductus*, for the ornamentation only distracts; it does not mark the way(s) through a work, it is without benefit. 'Curious' ornament is also unworthy, as it is chosen merely for show. One incident can represent many others. Work on the Divinity School of the University of Oxford was re-contracted in 1439, because of expense and delay, and the concerns of the university's donors and dons about the excessive and superfluous curiosity of the work (*super-vacuas curiositas*), in the form of crockets, babewyns, niches, and the like:

And because many magnates of the king and other learned men do not approve, but condemn, too much that is curious being undertaken for the aforesaid work, therefore the said University wishes that the said Thomas [Elkyn, the stonemason] stop at once, and immediately begin to redo so much superfluous curiosity, that is to say images in tabernacles, babewyns, casements and fillets, and all other curious things which are not pertinent to the building but to too great and sumptuous expense for the said University and too great delay to the said work. (Davis 1946–7: 79)<sup>38</sup>

Chaucer, who spent some time as clerk of the king's works, had perhaps a kinder view towards 'curious' decoration. He praises a monumental building for its beautiful workmanship, 'the cast [the design], the curiosite'.<sup>39</sup> But the words describe the great house of the utterly whimsical and arbitrary Lady Fame, so a reader might be expected to raise an eyebrow over the dreamer's enthusiasm for its style.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory the Great, *XL homiliarum in evangelia*, 2.36.4 (CCSL 141.335); Bede, *In Marci evangelium expositio* 4.15 (CCSL 120.1699) and *Libri quattuor in principium Genesis* 3.12 (CCSL 118A.1107). Bede moralizes Abraham's curiosity as a desire to move from one virtue to a higher one, understanding it as a positive not negative quality. Alcuin says that he carefully selected patristic extracts that would pose no obscurities or contradictions, 'veluti legentium curiositas facile probare poterit' (just such reading matters as your curiosity will easily be able to probe), from letter 462, to Gisela and Richtrude, sent with an anthology of excerpts that Alcuin had collected from the church fathers for them to study (PL 100.744C).

<sup>38</sup> The full Latin text is published in Anstey 1898: 1.192. Thanks to Paul Binski for this citation, and for first making me aware of this curious tale during his 2007 Slade Lectures in Oxford. The word *babewyn* is a variant medieval spelling of *baboon*, and refers to the characteristic marginal grotesques and hybrids of late medieval decoration, especially in books but also architectural sculpture (a medieval Latin verb is recorded, *babuinare*: see *OED*, s.v. *baboon*). Chaucer uses it of architectural decoration (*The House of Fame*, 1189).

<sup>39</sup> Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, 1078.

## POLYFOCAL PERSPECTIVE

So far, we have concerned ourselves with the effects of *varietas* upon sensibility and feeling, as a way both of analysing the purpose and formal character of style, and of assessing its effectiveness within a continuum of feeling, from tedium to distraction and even bewilderment. But we have not yet examined the nature of *varietas*, what it is that was thought to constitute pleasurable variety, and how that criterion shifted over the medieval millennium. I began this chapter with Procopius on Hagia Sophia; it will be instructive to return to his ekphrasis of its variegated marbles. In that description, Procopius stresses the strong contrasts of the colours ('the most contrasting colours'), and the sudden leaps of the eye ('the vision constantly shifts suddenly') as one detail after another seizes his gaze—it is this, he says, that produces its sense of remarkable harmony. The interior of Hagia Sophia, as Procopius describes it, is not monofocal but polyfocal, its harmony built from strong contrasts of diverse colours and materials and sudden shifts of view. It creates aesthetic *varietas* through *mixtura* and *diversitas*; these are among the qualities Procopius emphasizes.

The ancient architectural orders, pleasing in their dignified variety, did not allow for such diverse mixture. Indeed, an important distinction was maintained between *varietas* and *mixtura*. 'Mixture' has negative connotations in antiquity, both Greek and Latin, as productive of chaos and discord; in all canons of ancient style, mixture is a serious fault. Like all ancient rhetoric masters, when the *auctor ad Herennium* counselled varying the styles from one to another and back again, he did not think of this as mixing them. They retained their recognizable characters and the integrity or 'dignity' of their distinctive elements in relation to one another. But, as historians of architecture all know, the Christian emperor Constantine broke with these canons, and eclectically used bits of the old orders—the *spolia*—in his first buildings in Rome, the Arch of Constantine and the Lateran, occasioning a good deal of tongue-wagging at the time, and a lot of attention from historians (and popes and emperors) since. In an important article on this use of *spolia*, Beat Brenk emphasized how deliberate this stylistic mixing was, and indeed how costly to effect. The wide use of *spolia* in monuments can be dated specifically to Constantine's building programme in Rome, and it was not undertaken in ignorance or for want of building skills or materials. In the Lateran, green columns articulated the aisles and red ones the nave; Ionic and Corinthian capitals alternated for the first time. Brenk comments: 'Constantine's new aesthetics did not call for unity but rather for *varietas*. Permission was now

granted to mix the long-established architectural orders. That was entirely new. . . . Constantine's court architects deliberately gave up the time-honored form canon and mixed the architectural orders' (1987: 105–6). Brenk's comment needs some amending, for it is not the *varieta*s that is new, but the rhetorical intent and persuasive effectiveness of the mixing.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, ancient *varieta*s should produce an experience of *dignitas*, 'fittingness'. It produced as well *suavitas* and *gravitas*, 'weightiness'. In antiquity, variation involved an elegant articulation of the familiar, a persuasive harmony of the elements as they ought to be. But as we have seen, *varieta*s is equally a canon of medieval styles, especially those associated with two chronologically separate movements: Cluniac monasticism and the 13th-century movement we call the Gothic. Geoffrey of Vinsauf (whose *Poetria nova* of c. 1210 is the best general guide I know to high medieval aesthetic values) commends rich variety above all other qualities. A sample of his advice: 'proceed first of all by this step: although the meaning is one, let it not come content with one set of apparel. Let it vary its robes [*Sed variet vestes*] and assume different raiment'. Or: 'let the mind's finger pluck its blooms in the field of rhetoric. But see that your style blossoms sparingly with such figures, and with a variety. . . . From varied flowers a sweeter fragrance arises [*ex variis melior redolentia surgit*]' (PN 220–2, 1225–8; trans. Nims, 2010 [1967]: 2).

In the Latin west also, and much later in time than Procopius, one can find similar praise of variety in an architecture without immediately discernible perspective. One of the few medieval works on the plastic arts to contain both practical and theoretical advice is the treatise 'On the Diverse Crafts', written around 1120 by one 'Theophilus', a German monk. He addressed a novice, whom he was teaching how to design the interior decoration of a church:

you have embellished the ceilings or walls with varied work in different colours and have, in some measure, shown to beholders the paradise of God, glowing with various flowers, verdant with herbs and foliage. You have given them cause to praise the Creator in the creature and proclaim Him wonderful in His works. *For the human eye is not able to consider on what work first to fix its gaze*: if it beholds the ceilings they glow like brocades; if it considers the walls they are a kind of paradise; if it regards the profusion of light from the windows, it marvels at the inestimable beauty of the glass and the infinitely rich and various workmanship. (*De diversis artibus*, book 3, preface; my emphasis)<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> We will return to this work in Chapter 6 (the Latin text is in 193n47).

'For the human eye is not able to consider on what work first to fix its gaze': it is unlikely that Theophilus had read Procopius directly, far more likely that the inability of the eye to know where it should first look had become a virtuous feature of artistic *varietas*.

So what were the early medieval Christians up to when they so wilfully violated the ancient canons of style? And why would *varietas* become for them such a distinctive principle, not only of their rhetoric and poetry but of their architecture, their grand prayer-books, and their music? And in what did their sense of 'variety' consist? It is these questions that I will explore now; in doing so I am much indebted to Erich Auerbach's great essay on Christian Latin prose style, '*Sermo humilis*' (1965: 27–66).<sup>41</sup>

One major factor in the later medieval cultivation of *varietas* as an aesthetic value is the practice of monastic reading. Peter of Celle's treatise *On Affliction and Reading* is a reliable guide for this as well. He describes as follows the exercise (*exercitio*) of meditative reading (*lectio divina*) in one's cell:

[Such a way of r]eading teaches . . . because it constantly tells of the clash of virtues and vices . . . Reading is the soul's food, light, lamp, refuge, consolation, and the spice of every spiritual savour . . . Reading displays a steaming oven full of different kinds of bread, so that from them each person who hungers and thirsts for justice may be refreshed with the kind he chooses. In the breadbox of sacred reading are breads baked in an oven, breads roasted on a grill, or cooked in a frying pan, breads made with the first fruits and sprinkled with oil, and barley cakes.<sup>42</sup>

Peter emphasizes personal taste and individual choice among a great variety of breads, for anyone approaching the table on which they are heaped, 'people from any walk of life, age, sex, status, or ability', will be refreshed according to what suits them.<sup>43</sup> For Procopius, the plenteous

<sup>41</sup> Auerbach does not in fact talk about *varietas* per se, but rather the scandalously popular style of the Christian Bible in a context of the late classical canons of correctness or *latinitas*. Auerbach emphasized how this style broke with the canons producing ancient conventions of *dignitas*; this insight is fundamental. So too is the fact that Jerome, when he needed and wished to, wrote in a variety of late Latin styles, including the *humilis* of the Vulgate: he both kept and broke the ancient canons.

<sup>42</sup> 'Lectio ista docet quia uirtutum et uitiorum congressum tam continue narrat . . . Lectio animae est alimentum, lumen, lucerna, refugium, solatium, et condimentum omnium spiritualium saporum . . . spirantem clibanum panibus similaginis plenum ostendit, ut de quo genere panum uoluerit esuriens et sitiens iustitiam reficiatur. Continet in arca diuinae lectionis coctos in clibano, coctos in craticula, coctos in sartagine, aspersos oleo panes primitiarum, tortas de hordeo' (*De afflictione et lectione*, 234.18–36; trans. Feiss, 1987: 135).

<sup>43</sup> '[U]t cuiuscunque professionis ad mensam istam uenerit, cuiuscunque aetatis, cuiuscunque sexus et ordinis, cuiuscunque capacitatis, congrua sibi refectione omnes satientur' (*De afflictione et lectione*, 234.36–325.2; 1987: 135). The aesthetic issues raised by this text

variety of Hagia Sophia is its harmony; similarly for Peter, in its plenteous variety lies the harmony of Scripture. Each is polyfocal, many-voiced. And though of course diversity becomes in God ultimately single, as true religion teaches, there is an undeniable, unresolved tension between univocality and polyphony, simplex and multiplex. Those playful tensions within the experience itself constitute their generative principle, what makes the experience work aesthetically and also begins the process of making it into human knowledge. In this treatise on reading, Peter's emphasis is not on what the texts mean exegetically but on what it feels like to read them, as Procopius describes what it feels like to stand within Hagia Sophia and look around.

Peter also describes reading as a succession of contrasts: 'According to the inclinations of various feelings [*appetitum . . . diuersarum affectionum*] one should read now things old then new, now difficult then plain, now subtle then simple . . . now in order [*seria*] then playfully [*iocosa*].'<sup>44</sup> Reading is a series of antitheses and paradoxes, contrasting feelings yoked together but neither homogenized nor blended. Each quality retains its distinctiveness, as Peter's description makes plain. The aesthetic experience as described is non-hierarchical and polyfocal, variation of mood and feeling chosen for its own sake, brought about through the agency in the artefact of its various and varying colours (visual, verbal, or sonic). Neither reading nor being inside great churches is a calm or static experience, but one full of dynamism and change. Indeed, the 'open' narrative form so remarkable in medieval vernacular road literature (pilgrimages and other adventure tales) seems to me a manifestation in a different art form of similarly polyfocal values. Especially characteristic of romances (though not exclusive to them) is the variation of one adventure after another (it doesn't urgently seem to matter how the collections of stories unfold), the characteristic Eric Auerbach identified as 'paratactic structure', having 'free play in their variety' (1953: 111). Readers find out where they wish to look among many choices, whose stories to follow. Since such collections of adventures were read aloud in a social setting over some period of time,

are discussed at greater length in Carruthers 2006a. Peter's *Liber de panibus*, on the various 'breads' of the Bible (PL 202.929A–1046D), is dedicated to his friend John of Salisbury.

<sup>44</sup> 'Secundum appetitum uero diuersarum affectionum nunc noua, nunc uetera, nunc obscura, nunc aperta, nunc subtilia, nunc simplicia, nunc exempla, nunc mandata, nunc seria, nunc iocosa legenda sunt; ut anima *circumamicta* tam concordia *uarietate* uitet taedium et sumat remedium' (*De afflictione et lectione*, 235.38–236.4; 1987: 136–7). The allusion is to Psalm 44:15. I want to emphasize, however, that for Peter scriptural reading (*lectio divina*) was not simply therapeutic, but was an investigative, rational path to true knowledge of self and God. I made this argument as well in my broader examination of Peter's treatise (Carruthers 2006a).

this characteristic—like Peter of Celle’s various scriptural ‘breads’—is a virtue capable of promoting beneficial exchanges within a diverse group, as well as offering variations of mood to individual and even solitary readers.

A single page, chosen almost at random from a late medieval English prayer-book, may demonstrate the principle in yet another medium. On first looking at this page (Plate 8) from the early 14th-century book known as the Ormesby Psalter, only the most resolute of readers will be able to prevent her eyes from seeking out what is in the margins. Modern viewers are often puzzled by such vigorous juxtapositions, insisting that the exuberant profusion of the margins set against the relative purity of the text must be either a moral test for a pious reader or an artist’s joke at the expense of that piety. Nineteenth-century historians found such decoration to be confusing, ‘Dionysian’, even a little barbaric. But the medieval principles of variety and polyfocal perspective account for the phenomenon, for it is healthful, *sanus* and *salvus* both bodily and morally. Lauding the healthful social and personal benefits of mood variation in itself, Bernardino Gómez Miedes comments that the human mind, being constantly active, ‘in an odd way is pleased whether the things which occur are happy or sad, for by means of the variations, it receives pleasures in both cases. Indeed a mind wearied by listening or looking is either made fresh by surprise or renewed by laughter.’<sup>45</sup> This is a basic medieval aesthetic principle, deriving both from rhetoric and medicine.

## VARIETY AND DIVERSITY

Peter of Celle concludes his remarks on reading with the following observation: ‘[i]f the soul is thus compassed about with such a harmonious variety, it will avoid boredom and receive its cure [*ut anima circumamicta tam concordi uaritate uitet taedium*].’ These words conceal an allusion (though it would have been evident to his audiences at the time) to Psalm 44:10, 14–15: ‘filiae regum in honore tuo adstetit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato circumdata varietate . . . omnis gloria eius filiae regis ab intus in fimbriis aureis circumamicta varietatibus’ (‘The daughters of kings have delighted thee in thy glory. The queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety . . . All the glory

<sup>45</sup> ‘Hac itaque uarietate animus, cuius semper uarieque agere, mirum in modum delectatur ac siue laeta sint siue tristia quae occurrunt, modo tamen uaria, utraque laeta suscipit. Defessus quippe animus audiendo uidendoue aut admiratione integratur aut risu renouatur’ (Gómez Miedes, *Commentariorum de Sale*, 3.54. pars. 7–8; 2003: 2.666). Note that this paragraph is in the 1579 edition (in five books), but not in that of 1572 (in four).

of the king's daughter is within in golden borders, Clothed round about with varieties'). Psalm 44 was read, correctly, as an epithalamium. In verse 10, the queen (bride) is described as dressed in a golden robe *circumdata varietate*; in verses 14–15 she is amongst her ladies in *aureis fimbriis circumamicta varietatibus*. In his commentary, Augustine linked the bride of this Psalm to the Bride of the Song of Songs—that is, the Church—and he interpreted the varied colours of the queen's robe as follows: 'this represents the mysteries of our teaching, and the variety of languages in which they are expressed. The African tongue is one, the Syriac another, the Greek another, the Hebrew another . . . [*sic*] and many others there are. These languages make up the variety with which the queen's gown is adorned.'<sup>46</sup> In this influential comment, Augustine defined *varietas* as *diversitas*: 'Thus we comprehend *varietas* with respect to diversity of languages.'<sup>47</sup> Echoing this same idea about 150 years later, Cassiodorus says in his commentary that '*varietas* here denotes either manifold tongues, because every nation hymns the Creator in church according to its native region, or the loveliest diversity of virtues', and he too uses the word *diversitas* synonymously with *varietas*.<sup>48</sup>

Thus Augustine and Cassiodorus, two of the most influential commentators on this important Psalm text, both defined variety not in terms of *dignitas* but of *diversitas*. Master scholars of rhetoric as they both were, this lasting change of the textbook definition is significant. It is not the 'suitability' of the elements together as a whole that is emphasized, but rather their great differences which are nonetheless brought together. At the time, the change was an astonishing breach of ancient stylistic decorum. Mixing diverse languages was identified as a stylistic fault by Quintilian, who called it *sardismos*. This fault is 'a style made up of a mixture of several kinds of language [*mixta ex varia ratione linguarum*], for example a confusion of Attic with Doric, Aeolic with Ionic. We Romans', Quintilian continues, 'commit a similar fault, if we combine the sublime

<sup>46</sup> '[S]acramenta doctrina in linguis omnibus uariis. Alia lingua afra, alia syra, alia graeca, alia hebraea, alia illa et illa: faciunt istae linguae uarietatem uestis reginae huius' (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 44; CCSL 38.512.11–13; 2002: 2.302).

<sup>47</sup> 'Ecce uarietatem intelleximus de diuersitate linguarum' (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.*, on Ps. 44:10; CCSL 38.512.16–17; 2002: 2.302). Augustine repeats this idea when glossing verse 15: 'in fimbriis autem aureis uarietas linguarum doctrinae decus' (CCSL 38.515.22–3); 'in her gold fringes [*fimbriis*] is a variety of tongues, setting forth the splendour of her teaching' (2002: 2.306).

<sup>48</sup> 'Sed hic uarietatem, aut linguas multiplices significat, quia omnis gens secundum suam patriam in ecclesia psallit auctori; aut uirtutum pulcherrimam diuersitatem' (Cassiodorus, *Expositio in psalmo* 44.10; CCSL 97.410.313–16; trans. Walsh, 1990–1: 1.447). Further references are to this edition and this translation. The comments of both Augustine and Cassiodorus were summarized in the standard medieval glosses on this Psalm.

with the mean, the ancient with the modern, the poetic with the vulgar, for this produces a monster like the one Horace invents at the beginning of his *ars poetica* (*Inst. orat.* 8.3.60),<sup>49</sup> which he then quotes. The lines were a famous aesthetic statement: would it not be a sight causing derision if a painter chose to join a human head to a horse's neck and to put a variety of feathers everywhere on its gathered limbs, or made a beautiful woman devolve into a ugly fish?<sup>50</sup> Augustine would certainly have known of this strong ancient dislike for mixing. He has ostentatiously invited it by praising linguistic diversity as an essential quality of redemption, one of many occasions when he departs from ancient canons. Most commonly in medieval Latin, *dignitas* is a social virtue, used of persons to mean 'honour' and 'respect'. As a quality of style, *dignitas*, understood as proficient use of rhetorical 'colours', returns to the classroom together with the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, chiefly in Italy in the later 12th and early 13th centuries (Alessio 2006). By then, the taste for and understanding of 'variety' was much changed.

In his commentary on Psalm 44, Augustine is quick to emphasize the unity from which the Church's multiple diversity is generated, multiplicity expressed from and expressing a simplex. Usually this idea is attributed to his neoplatonism, and this undoubtedly could help to justify such a major shift of taste. Equally significant is 1 Corinthians 12:4, which celebrates the diverse community of the Church: 'there are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit.' But there is a commonplace rhetorical idea behind Augustine's formulation as well, which incorporates the notion of the persuasive *colores* of rhetoric, and as well perhaps the notion embedded in Greek *poiesis*, composition as making something from many different colours. The Greek word applied especially to embroideries (as Latin *textus* did to weaving). For Augustine, the resultant cloth, the variegated robe of the bride in Psalm 44, shares the emphasis on strong diversity characteristic of post-Constantinian antiquity. For the colours' variation is contrasted in Augustine's commentary to 'gold', the unchanging simplex—'unus'—which they clothe so diversely. It is not the colours' fittingness but their sharp differences which Augustine emphasizes (*dignitas*

<sup>49</sup> See also Lausberg 1973: 1074. Renaissance rhetoric masters preferred the term *soraismos* (see Lanham 1991: 142). Both readings are based on early manuscripts of Quintilian; Winterbottom, the Oxford Classical Texts editor, prefers *sardismos*.

<sup>50</sup> 'Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam / iungere si velit et varias inducere plumas / undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum / desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne, / spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici?' (Horace, *De arte poetica liber*, lines 1–5). The mermaid is sometimes a subject of Romanesque capitals: could that subject choice be in part a homage to these lines from Horace, whose *De arte poetica* was a subject of academic commentary, especially in Paris, during the 12th century?

does not occur in this passage). Yet all these manifold tongues express one faith: 'Indeed as the variation of the garment concords in a unity, so also all languages in one belief.'<sup>51</sup> But in what way? The metaphor he chooses, though common, is worth examining.

but what is the gold [i.e. what is unchanging] in that same variety? Wisdom itself. Whatever the variety of tongues may be, one 'gold' is preached: not a diversity of 'golds', but variety concerning the 'gold'. Indeed all tongues preach one wisdom, one doctrine and discipline. There is variety in tongues, 'gold' in their sense.<sup>52</sup>

Augustine's distinction between languages (which have *varietas*) and *sententia* (the 'gold' of confident faith which does not change) is presented at greater length in his *De doctrina christiana*,<sup>53</sup> and there as throughout his writing their relationship proves difficult to define. Indeed he is well aware, in *De doctrina*, of the potential of *varietas* for schism and heresy, as he also indicates in his comment on Psalm 44:10: 'May there be variety in the garment, but not rending.'<sup>54</sup> For all its persuasive virtue—a virtue which, as we have seen, is constrained in ancient practice by accepted conventions concerning *dignitas*—*varietas* can be politically and institutionally dangerous. Like so many other aesthetic terms from the Middle Ages, *varietas*, perhaps especially as *diversitas*, is ambiguous, active simultaneously *in bono et in malo*. It is perhaps worth recalling in this context Augustine's wry comment in *The City of God*, that God must have employed the rhetorical figure of antithesis when He fashioned human beings and let them loose to act in Paradise.<sup>55</sup> For Augustine, diverse verbal colours fittingly mark out and adorn sentential gold; the idea is familiar from rhetoric, as the orator is trained to clothe the sense (*sententia*) of his matter in pleasingly various verbal figures and tropes (*colores*). As a statement about verbal signification this is inadequately vague for philosophy. It makes better sense in art. Just such a contrast between variety of colours and golden simplex is apparent later as a principle of Byzantine

<sup>51</sup> '[Q]uomodo autem uarietas uestis in unitate concordat, sic et omnes linguae ad unam fidem' (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.*, on Ps. 44:10; CCSL 38.512.14).

<sup>52</sup> '[I]n ipsa autem uarietate aurum quod est? Ipsa sapientia. Quaelibet sit uarietas linguarum, unum aurum praedicatur: non diuersum aurum, sed uarietas de auro. Eamdem quippe sapientiam, eamdem doctrinam et disciplinam omnes linguae praedicant. Varietas in linguis, aurum in sententiis' (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.*, on Ps. 44:10; CCSL 38.512.17–22).

<sup>53</sup> See esp. *De doct. christ.* 3.10.14–14.22.

<sup>54</sup> '[I]n ueste uarietas sit, scissura non sit' (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.*, on Ps. 44:10; CCSL 38.512.15).

<sup>55</sup> See *De civ. Dei* 11.18. Similar ambivalence can be found in his extravagant praise—yet caution—concerning the value of *dulcedo*.

mosaic composition—and as has often been noted, the gold glass *tesserae* catch and distribute light to the colours.<sup>56</sup> Augustine wrote well before the 6th century when the earliest of the great glass tesserae mosaics that survive were first constructed, but his well-known *sententia* found its clearest expression through their means.

Augustine's Psalms commentary did not cause this significant change of cultural perception concerning diversity and mixture, but his words certainly reflect it and helped to give it authority. We cannot now understand how the change came about solely by examining the ancient pedagogies of rhetoric and their transmission. The new taste for diversity must owe a great deal to the aesthetic conventions and social realities of the late empire—fostering perhaps that same taste which prompted Constantine's architects to vary the elements of the old orders through a studied, even an aggressive diversity. Cassiodorus adds the following thought about Psalm 44 to Augustine. The *varietas* of the bride's robe is also like the diversity of gifts, of virtues, which the faithful possess. Indeed, he says it is like the Church itself: 'Clothed with their diversity [of virtues], of necessity the universal church is dressed in a multicoloured garment.' He continues: 'The garments of Aaron likewise conveyed this, for they were woven of gold, purple, fine linen, crimson, and violet.'<sup>57</sup>

One's very notion of harmony is changed as one's emphasis shifts from imagining fittingness to imagining diversity as a desirable stylistic norm, even the governing norm. In classical antiquity, the variety of elements was fitted together as they were made worthy within a concordant whole—as parts of that whole, they acquired *dignitas*. In the Christians' aesthetic, the elements are perceived as producing harmony through (or despite) their very discordance and many colours; the emphasis is on their *diversitas*. The change can be measured in the following incident, described around 1481 by the Dominican friar Felix Fabri. Describing the pilgrim crowds as his own company approached the Holy Land, he writes of how they all began to sing a hymn together in their boats:

each man singing it according to the music of his own choir [*secundum notam chori sui*]. I have never heard so sweet and joyous a song, for there were many voices, and out of their multiple different sounds sweet discant and harmony were made in a particular way; for all alike sang the same words, but through

<sup>56</sup> See for example Demus 1948: 35–7, and esp. Ladner 1958. On the vexed question of the earliest uses of glass tesserae, including the ones made with gold, see James 2006.

<sup>57</sup> 'Quibus diuersitatibus induta, necesse est discolori amictu catholica uestiatur Ecclesia. Hoc et uestis illa significauit Aaron, quae auro, purpura, bysso, cocco hyacinthoque contexta est' (Cassiodorus, *Expositio in psalmo* 44.15; CCSL 97.412.412–13; trans. Walsh, 1990–1: 1, 447).

their notes they ‘dissonated’ in a sweet melody, and it was very pleasant to hear so many clerics simultaneously join in one song out of pure joy. There were many Latin clergy, Sclavonians, Italians, Lombards, Gauls, Franks, Germans, Englishmen, Irishmen, Hungarians, Scots, Dacians, Bohemians, and Spaniards, and many who spoke the same tongue, but came from different [*diversis*] dioceses, and belonged to different [*diversis*] religious orders. Wondrously [*mirabile*] all these sang Te Deum.<sup>58</sup>

Evidently Friar Felix knew his Augustine, at least from the Ordinary Gloss. Out of the multiple song of the pilgrims sweet harmony is made, yet in their multiplicity each remains distinct; they are not homogenized. Indeed they form a sort of audible *mappamundi*, the entire Church diversely singing—which is of course Felix Fabri’s point.

An emphasis upon harmony as diversity is found throughout the Middle Ages. The 9th-century music treatise, *Musica enchiriadis*, presents a similar view of harmony as *discordia concors*: ‘Through these numerical relationships [i.e. the Boethian ratios], by which unlike sounds concord with each other, the eternal harmony of life and of the conflicting elements of the whole world is united as one with material things’.<sup>59</sup> And in his *Micrologus*, Guido d’Arezzo describes musical harmony by emphasizing difference and change:

hearing takes pleasure in a variety of sounds, as sight delights in variety of colours, smell is aroused by a variety of odours, and the tongue delights in changing savours. Thus through the body’s windows, the agreeableness

<sup>58</sup> ‘Nunquam audiui tam laetum et suavem cantum. Erant enim voces multae, et ex multiplici dissonatis dulcis quodammodo discantus et harmonia causabatur. Nam omnes eadem quidam verbum sonabant, sed notis quadam suavi modulatione dissonabant, et jocundum valde fuit audire tot clericos simul eundem cantum concinere ex laetitia. Ibi erant clerici latini multi, sclavi, italici, lombardi, gallici, franci, theutonici, anglici, hibernici, ungari, scoti, daci, bohemi et hispani, et multi eiusdem quidem linguae, sed de diversis dioecsesibus et de diversis ordinibus. Et hic omnes mirabile Te Deum cantabant’ (*Fratris Felicis Fabri Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae*, 2.184; trans. Stewart, 1892–3). My thanks to Kathryn Beebe for calling my attention to this passage; on Felix Fabri’s pilgrimage see Beebe 2007. The First Crusade chronicler, Fulcher of Chartres, similarly praises the linguistic diversity of the united army marching on Antioch, listing nineteen nations from the Scots to the Armenians—in contrast, he consistently refers only to ‘the Turks’ (Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, 1.13.4; 1998: 68). Doctrinally, the trope derives from Acts 2:5–11. Often, when this trope is invoked, much is made of how one person could not understand the diverse languages, yet the whole is harmonious. As an aesthetic taste it may also find some (contrafactual) expression in the vogue for multilingual, polyphonic secular song in the late Middle Ages.

<sup>59</sup> ‘[I]isdem numerorum partibus, quibus sibi collati inaequales soni concordant, et vitae cum corporibus et compugnantiae elementorum totiusque mundi concordia aeterna coerit’ (*Musica enchiriadis*, cap. 18.58–61; trans. Erickson, 1985). Thanks to members of the Covent Garden Seminar, convened by Susan Rankin, for a lively exchange concerning *varietas* in early music, during which these passages were discussed.

[*suavitas*] of the things compatible with it [*habiliū rerū*] wondrously enters the innards of the heart. Thus it is that the health of both heart and body is lessened or increased according to particular tastes and smells and likewise the sight of specific colours.<sup>60</sup>

'Polyfocal perspective' applies not just to medieval visual experience but auditory as well, it would seem. And the extraordinary complexities of consonances and dissonances, concords and discords of both musical and verbal sounds that are exploited in late medieval musical compositions, which have received such fruitful attention of late, are yet another exploration of this fundamental principle in medieval aesthetic. Like the eye upon entering Hagia Sophia, so the ear hearing a Machaut motet, at first does not know how to listen—'To what should I pay attention?' is the auditory equivalent of 'Where should I first look?'—and is delighted again and again by the varying movements within such a work. It cannot be taken in all at once, which is exactly the point.<sup>61</sup>

As we have seen, the biological complexion of elements mirrors the most profound mystery of the Christian religion. Perhaps it is in the exegesis of this mystery—the Incarnation—that a second major clue can be found to why the Christians so abruptly, aggressively, and tenaciously shifted their sense of what constituted appropriate *varietas* (what Guido, in *Micrologus*, 14.167, calls *varietas rationabilis*). In her essay on monsters and hybridity, Caroline Bynum called attention to Bernard of Clairvaux's third sermon for Christmas Eve, in which Bernard explores the earthly nature of Jesus as a miraculous mixture. This marks his human nature, for humans are all mixtures. But the *mixtura* of God and human which took place in the Virgin's womb is a yet greater marvel, even a kind of monstrosity:

there are three works, three mixtures [*tres mixturas*], that the all-powerful majesty did in assuming our flesh—so singularly marvelous and marvelously singular that nothing like them has been or ever will be done on earth . . . Wonderful are these mixtures, and more marvelous than any miracle, for so diverse [*tam diversa*] and even so opposed [*tamque divisa*] to one another, they were joined together. And indeed consider the creation, the ordering of

<sup>60</sup> 'Nec mirum si varietate sonorum delectatur auditus, cum varietate colorum gratuletur visus, varietate odorum foveatur olfactus, mutatisque saporibus lingua congaudeat. Sic enim per fenestras corporis habiliū rerū suavitas intrat mirabiliter penetrat alia cordis. Inde est quod sicut quibusdam saporibus et odoribus vel etiam colorum intuitu salus tam cordis quam corporis vel minuitur vel augecit' (Guido d'Arezzo, *Micrologus*, 14.159–60; my translation, consulting that of Babb in Palisca and Babb 1978).

<sup>61</sup> Many musicologists have analysed such complexities in particular works, for instance Bent 2003 on a Machaut motet. See also Leach 2010 on the delightful complexities involved in performing such a work.

its parts! God mixed [*miscuit*] the vile slime of earth with vital force . . . And to honor [man] more, he united in his person God and slime, majesty and lowliness, such vileness and such sublimity . . . This is the first and most excellent mixture [*mixtura*] . . . the first mixture is a poultice to cure infirmities. The two species are ground and mixed together in the Virgin's womb as in a mortar, with the Holy Spirit the pestle sweetly mixing them.<sup>62</sup>

To compare this statement with this same Bernard's invective against monstrosities in the cloister is to understand the complexity both of his own love of hyperbolic paradox—itsself stylistically a wonderful mixture of slime and sublimity—and the distance travelled by *varietas* from the emphasis on *dignitas* in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* to the high and late Middle Ages. Bernard embraces those same horrid mixtures that for Horace are objects of derision and signs of incompetence, as indeed did both the Romanesque style of his own time and the later Gothic. He may appear Horatian at first blush—his *Apologia* condemnation of curiosity certainly alludes to Horace with apparent approval—but his aesthetic sensibility is by no means Horatian.

The shift of taste so perceptible in early Christian style, culminating in what would have seemed to Horace not pleasing variety but an embrace of perverse mixtures, seems to me to be the result of two profound developments. One is the perceived (and actual) nature of the Church from its earliest Pentecostal days, whose diversity is recorded in Acts, theologized in 1 Corinthians, and celebrated in the commentators' understanding of Psalm 44.<sup>63</sup> Diversity certainly marked Paul's understanding of the Church, in terms of its peoples and their particular traits and 'gifts'. This was also the understanding of Origen, who embraces its diversity in his influential commentaries on the Bible. For instance, in a sermon

<sup>62</sup> 'Tria opera, tres mixturas fecit omnipotens illa maiestas in assumptione nostrae carnis, ita mirabiliter singularia et singulariter mirabilia, ut talia nec facta sint, nec facienda sint amplius super terram. Coniuncta quippe sunt ad invicem Deus et homo, Mater et virgo, fides et cor humanum. Admirabiles istae mixturae, et omni miraculo mirabilis, quomodo tam diversa, tamque divisa ab invicem, invicem potuere coniungi. [216.27–217.3] . . . In creatione vide quam multa et quam magna potenter creata sunt; [217.6–7] . . . Huic enim limo terreno vim vitalem miscuit [217.9] . . . ut quod melius habebat [217.17] . . . limo nostro coniungeret, et in persona una sibi invicem unirentur Deus et limus, maiestas et infirmitas, tanta vilitas et sublimitas tanta. [217.18–19] . . . Haec est prima et superexcellens mixtura; et haec prima inter tres. [216.2–3] . . . In prima remedium est, quia ex Deo et homine cataplasma confectum est, quod sanaret omnes infirmitates tuas. Contusae sunt autem et commistae hae duae species in utero Virginis, tanquam in mortariolo; Sancto Spiritu, tanquam pistillo, illas suaviter commiscente [219.13–18]' (Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Sermon 3, In vigilia nativitatis'; *SBO* 4.216–19, trans. Bynum, 2001: 122).

<sup>63</sup> See the account in Acts 2:1–13. The narrative emphasizes the fact that every person heard the apostolic preaching in their own language (compare Peter of Celle's celebration of the diversity of the biblical texts as 'breads').

commenting on the enumerating of the Hebrew tribes by Moses (Numbers 2–3), making a comparison between this incident and Paul’s ‘gathering in’ of the earliest Church, Origen enumerates not ethnicities and languages but particular tempers. As each Israelite tribe was distinctively marked by their sign (*signum*), so, Origen says, ‘I judge there to be various traits in our minds [*in animis signa diversa*], for some are mild and placid, others ebullient, turbulent, or difficult; some careful and circumspect, others neglectful and careless.’ He concludes: ‘as I recall the most wise Solomon saying somewhere, “as various as one facial countenance is from others, even so various are the hearts of men”.’<sup>64</sup> Origen’s remark recognizes the classical rhetorician’s caution that one must always be aware of the different characters and moods of one’s audiences; his remark does not seem to refer to audiences composed of great differences in social rank and even ethnicity. Two centuries later this had changed.

Historians of rhetoric have long noted that medieval masters emphasize how a preacher must constantly be aware of great social and occupational differences in his audiences, and speak variously to them. Ancient rhetoricians never made such broad concessions, for they did not speak to masses but to ‘judges’, in both forensic and deliberative orations; later an orator spoke to and for the emperor. The difference of intention is well articulated in Augustine’s practical work for preachers, *De catechizandis rudibus*:

And when we are speaking in such a way [that is, preaching], there may be just a few people present or many, educated or uneducated or a mixture of both, city-dwellers or country people or these and those together, or a crowd composed of all kinds of people. It is not possible but that in one way or another they will affect those who are about to speak and teach, and that the address which is produced, because of the emotions of the soul from which it is delivered, displays as it were a kind of facial expression, and by that same diversity diversely affects the listeners, even as they in turn variously influence one another in its presence.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Origen, ‘Sermons on Numbers’, sermon 2, par. 2 (LLT-A). This whole passage was copied verbatim by Hrabanus Maurus in his Commentary on Numbers (PL 108.601). The maxim attributed to ‘somewhere in Solomon’ is ‘Sicut diversi sunt vultus vultibus, ita et diversa sunt corda hominum’. In the entire PL, MGH, and CCSL/CCCM it occurs only in this one instance in Origen, copied by Hrabanus.

<sup>65</sup> ‘[E]t cum ita dicimus, utrum pauci adsint an multi; docti an indocti an ex utroque genere mixti; urbani an rustici an hi et illi simul; an populus ex omni hominum genere temperatus sit. Fieri enim non potest, nisi aliter atque aliter afficiant locuturum atque dicturum, et ut sermo qui profertur, affectionis animi a quo profertur, quemdam quasi vultum gerat, et pro eadem diuersitate diuerse afficiat auditores, cum et ipsi se ipsos diuerse afficiant inuicem praesentia sua’ (Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, 15.23; CCSL 46.147.16–24). The word I have translated as ‘facial expression’, *vultus*, is a technical term used in discussing rhetorical delivery, and is usually found in conjunction with *gestus*

Suffice it to observe that no previous manual of rhetoric had emphasized this point in this way—they simply do not imagine speaking to an audience so diverse.

Another profound influence favouring the revaluation of ancient stylistic canons was, I think, having to make the apologetic case for the Incarnation, to the Romans and Greeks in particular. Well before Constantine, Tertullian wrote of the Incarnation as follows: ‘for the substance of Jesus will be of two things, a sort of mixture from body and spirit, like electrum from gold and silver’.<sup>66</sup> The mixture of human and divine was scandalous foolishness not just conceptually but also because it abused antique aesthetic experience, a decorum based on *dignitas*. A couple of centuries later, well after the Christians had established themselves, Augustine wrote a letter, also explaining the Incarnation as a mixture. As ‘a person is a mixture of soul and body, so Christ is a mixture of flesh and God’. And then he seems to pause and cast a glance towards Horace and his beloved Cicero: ‘si tamen non indigne ad ista mixtionis vel mixturae nomen admittitur’ (‘if indeed the name of *mixtio* or *mixtura* may not unsuitably be applied to this phenomenon’).<sup>67</sup> Notice that adverb, *indigne*. Tertullian could not care less about ancient *dignitas*—he would as soon have been done with the whole antique project. Bernard of Clairvaux inhabited a completely different aesthetic world, in which monstrous mixtures have their honoured places as embodying the bold antitheses and paradoxes that define his sensibility as well as his thought. Augustine seems still to be caught between worlds—but that position entirely suits his dignity.

and *vox*. On the actual make-up of audiences for 4th-century sermons, see MacMullan 1989 and 2003.

<sup>66</sup> ‘[J]am erit substantia Jesus ex duabus, ex carne et spiritu mixtura quaedam, ut electrum ex auro et argento’ (Tertullian, ‘Against Praxeas’, 27; CCSL 2.1199.43–8). This makes what we would call a compound, or a ‘tertium quid’, as Tertullian says, neither gold, nor silver: and thus not really a mixture but only a ‘sort of’ mixture, ‘mixtura quaedam’.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Ergo persona hominis, mixtura est animae et corporis: persona autem Christi, mixtura est Dei et hominis [CSEL 44.110.8–9] . . . si tamen non indigne ad ista mixtionis uel mixturae nomen admittitur [CSEL 44.111.4–5]’ (Augustine, *Epistula* 137(78).11, to Volusianus).

## 6

### Ordinary Beauty

Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova.

Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.27

So far in these essays, I have focused on various aesthetic values and concepts without ever introducing an idea of beauty. This undoubtedly has seemed odd to most of my readers, perhaps even a bit coy. So in this last chapter, I will finally turn to ‘beauty’ and try to justify my seeming prevarication. I have delayed so long in order to emphasize the ordinary, human characteristics of medieval aesthetic tastes, their valuing of the ‘ordinary beauty’ of human artefacts. These, I have argued, begin in a view of the created world, including the human sensory experiences to which artefacts must answer, as one that is in constant movement—changing, fluctuating mixtures among the influences of opposing elemental qualities.

I can best show what I mean by ‘ordinary beauty’ by contrasting two expressions of it from two fundamental patristic authors. First, in a letter (composed in 358) to Gregory Nazianzen, Basil of Caesarea wrote as follows about monastic retreat:

Let there be such a place as ours, separate from intercourse with men, that the tenor of our exercises be not interrupted from without... Soothing hymns compose the mind to a cheerful and calm state... The tongue purified from the gossip of the world; the eye unexcited by fair colour or comely shape; the ear not relaxing the tone of the mind [*ton tonon tēs psuchēs*] by voluptuous songs, nor by that especial mischief, the talk of light men and jesters. Thus the mind [*Nous*], saved from dissipation from without, and not through the senses thrown upon the world [*upo tōn aistheteriōn epi ton kosmon diacheomenos*], falls back upon itself and thereby ascends to the contemplation of God. When that beauty shines about it [*kakeinō tō kallei perilampomenos*], it even forgets its very nature.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Basil of Caesarea, letter 2 (PG 32.225C, 228A; trans. Newman, 1895).

Contrast Augustine, writing a few decades earlier:

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new, late have I loved you. And behold you were inside and I outside and there I sought you, and into those lovely things which you have made I, deformed, rushed headlong. You were in-me'd and I was not in-you'd . . . You cried and shouted and burst open my deafness; you flared out and gleamed and drove away my blindness; you emitted your sweet scent and I drew my breath and pant after you; I tasted and I am hungry and I thirst; you touched me and I blazed up in your peace.<sup>2</sup>

'Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova'—a famous passage. But one needs to read it in its context, and when one does it is abundantly clear that Basil's *kalos* is not the same as Augustine's *pulchritudo*. Instead of drawing away from the sensory world, Augustine's cry to God as *pulchritudo* thrusts him vigorously into the midst of an energetic torrent of sensations. Consider those strong verbs, *rupisti*, *corucasti*, *fragrasti*, and finally 'tetegisti me, et exarsi'—'you touched me and I was inflamed' by desire, sexual desire, for that is the usual context for *exarsi* when applied to a human being.

*Pulchritudo* is a 'difficult' word, morally ambivalent in much the same way and for similar reasons as *dulcedo*. It was applied to fancy boys and prostitutes as well as to the more high-minded beauties of painting and prose and of nature. Augustine could have selected another word here (*sublimitas*? *bellitudo*? *splendor*?). All were in existence, though emphasizing different aspects. Why not use *sublimitas*, meaning 'exalted in nature', 'high-minded', 'of high rank'—this seems most suitable for God. It was associated with tragic theatre; *gravitas* and *sublimitas* were both stylistic qualities long associated with verbal beauty, *venustus eloquii*. *Bellitudo* existed as a word in classical Latin, but no one much used it, and it is ugly (though, via Old French, it gives to English the word *beauty*). But Augustine was not shy of redefining, or even coining a word if he needed one, and there are plenty of candidates. And wouldn't *splendor*, *splendor lucis*, have been more fitting than *pulchritudo*? That idea certainly became appropriate in the 12th and 13th centuries, in the work of such scholars as Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon. It would have been more aptly neoplatonist, and indeed the idea occurs in this very passage, as Augustine speaks of how God gleamed upon him, *splenduisti*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi. Et ecce intus eras et ego foris, et ibi te quaerebam, et in ista formosa, quae festisti, deformis inruebam; mecum eras et tecum non eram . . . Vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam; corucasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam; fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelum tibi; gustavi, et esurio et sitio; tetegisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam' (Augustine, *Conf.* 10.27).

So *pulchritudo* is not the obvious nor the only choice of name for God. But nor is it the obvious alternative for translating the Greek concept *kalos*: plain old *bonitas* would have avoided many problems. Yet Augustine chose *pulchritudo*, with all its emphasis on surface and colours because, I think, he wanted to underscore that even divine beauty is apprehended by human beings through vigorous sensations—coruscating sight, rupturing hearing, overwhelming scent and taste, inflaming and arousing touch. Those sensations are not found in the object but in the person apprehending it. In other words, Augustine here deliberately does not take the neoplatonic route, in order to keep the human contact; to maintain that Beauty is an experience of human sensations in human bodies, and any *pulchritudo* which is not generated in an individual human being is—Augustine implies here—no beauty at all.

## INTENTION, AGAIN

In Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 5, I pointed out that the phrase *intentio auctoris*, the author's intention, refers not to what the human artist or poet may or may not have decided to do initially, but rather to an 'intention' within the work itself. This is expressed through its whole articulation, the invention and arrangement of its forms and styles, just as the 'intention' of a particular rose is articulated by its shapes and colours as an inseparable particular experience, as we saw in Chapter 2. Our perceptual experience is not solipsistic or illusory. The artefact is real, its 'intention' is drawn from it as a sensation-derived, mental image which 'intends' the perceiving mind. But this intention, while drawn from a real object, is also to some extent coloured by 'intention' on the part of the mind perceiving it. We initially perceive things as discrete data from all our sense organs; this must be formed and shaped by our minds into a comprehensible image. Such intentions are error-prone, in addition to the normal limits of our sense organs. Any perception, in this psychology, is a complicated interplay of actual facts and necessary fictions, not transparent at all.

Much attention was paid in rhetorical teaching to how exactly to impart this intention, once invented, to a work so that in turn its intention would be understood and persuasively intend someone else. This was the task of organization, *dispositio*, and stylistic 'covering' or *venustas*. The Greek value, *to prepon*, usually now translated as 'arrangement', was rendered in Latin by Cicero and others as *decorum*, verbal form *deceat*. It is unfortunate that the analytical convenience to rhetorical teaching of dividing Arrangement from Style has become so fixed that English (though not French) can no longer use a single word for both. But the Greek and Latin

words convey order and style together, without any clumsy separation. Style is 'the completion of a process of artifice' (Copeland and Sluiter 2009: 33). Focus on the continuousness of this process, which can only conclude in the varying occasions of the work's perception and performance by others, is also basic to how medieval artefacts were valued. For, in this aesthetic analysis, a work is not inanimate, produced once and forever unchanged (like Keats's Grecian urn). Every artefact is an agent, and each time it is experienced it must act anew in changed circumstances. A major thread of this book has been that works of art do not just simulate or represent human feelings but *produce* them in those who are experiencing the work—artefacts are agents in our emotions and thoughts as well as our sensations. The mental image we create when we intend to perceive something is not just a likeness but a likeness with intentions of its own. These agents are the formal arrangements of its parts and the *intentiones* of its stylistic choices. Of course, these choices were planned by the original maker but once they are in an artefact, the original maker no longer has full control. This is true even when that maker is a speaking orator, for the audiences of a speech by their reactions crucially determine how and even what is said. As Augustine comments, sermons have their own kind of expression (*vultus*) which varies with different audiences, and an orator must take this into account in speaking. This is the agent triad that Aristotle identified: *ethos* (the character of an orator assumed in delivering a speech), *logos* (the character of the speech apparent through its *prepon*, its particular verbal choices), *pathos* (the audience's responses). The model is essentially oral and social.

It should also be kept in mind that psychological intention, as the mental form of something perceived, is different from the rhetorical 'intention of the author', conveyed through a work's organizational and stylistic choices, or *decorum*. They are not, I think, contradictory ideas at all, but their emphasis is different. *Intentio* in medieval scholastic psychology underlines the particularity of the thing perceived *in seipsum*, its 'thisness'. Aristotelian psychology stressed that sensory knowledge is a process of abstracting ideas from particular experiences, rather than recognizing something as an instance of a pre-existing abstraction. As applied to experiences of artefacts, 'intention' in this sense gives psychological priority to the particular sensory configurations of an artefact as we experience it; only after these have been given shape uniquely as a mental image are they capable of intellection. Rhetorical intention is a property of an artefact as it is given shape and direction through its particular formal and stylistic *ductus*.

Rhetorical pedagogy thinks of Delivery in terms of an orator performing his speech to his judging audience. But the agency of the orator was

frequently displaced onto the artefact itself. Thus Horace says that poems should not just be pretty, but act on a listener as they may wish ('quocumque volent'). The grammar makes clear that it is the poems ('poemata') which do the wishing and acting, the *poems* that have intentions upon the minds of their listeners.<sup>3</sup> Augustine speaks of how a sermon, through the communal act of being delivered to an audience, acquires a kind of 'facial expression' (*vultus*) suitable to each occasion. Nor is such agency posited only for literature. Supreme among medieval artefacts is the liturgy, which only comes into being through its various performances on specific occasions, each with *vox*, *vultus*, and *gestus* that are shared by all present, rather as Augustine described his sermons' performances. Music was thought to affect health and feeling directly (and indeed it still is), as was the decorum of buildings. And the several stories of paintings and statues coming to life as people gaze on them would seem to be expressions of this same idea, that an artefact itself has agency through its persuasive means of disposition and style. Medieval paintings, after all, commonly and often copiously speak through voice scrolls and *tituli*.

The work's intention, already a movement outwards, is carried along through its *ductus*. I have already introduced this term in regard to intention and to variation. Obviously aesthetic *varietas* imparts movement to a work: without it, it is only boring and dead. As we have seen, this movement is guided not only by formal elements but by all the colours, whether verbal or sonic or material, of its varying styles. All medieval art moves, not only emotionally but directionally. It conveys one to some (other) place or some other feeling or sensation. We have examined many characteristic values of aesthetic delight, all implying some movement:

- 1 Delight that sensory perceptions such as 'sweetness' are not experienced as simple or pure but as strong mixtures of opposing qualities that are constantly shifting between change and balance; and indeed that antithesis and paradox are principles not only of logic and grammar but of basic sense experiences incorporating changing mixtures of elemental qualities.
- 2 Delight in ever-proliferating detail and the consequent promotion of what I have called 'polyfocal perspective', in which the pleased perceiver, at first perhaps overawed, learns to choose where best to look next, guided by his own intentions and those perceived in the

<sup>3</sup> 'Non satis est pulchra esse poemata; dulcia sunt / et, quocumque uolent, animus auditoris agunt' ('It is not enough for poems to be beautiful—they must be sweet and, as they may wish, act on the mind of a listener') (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 99–100). For Augustine's comment concerning the varying *vultus* of his sermons, see Chapter 5.

details he gazes upon, in the bending and turning motions of desire that Dante describes as 'love'.

- 3 Delight in how opposites 'mirror' their qualities, as laughter with tears, *ludus* with *seria*, and how this continually varying tensive balancing impels both the work and its audience. Even the most static of icons, the Pantokrator (Majestas Domini) figure imposed hugely in wall mosaic or mural, seems to move its gaze (when executed well) towards a viewer, whether approaching directly or from an angle.<sup>4</sup> And the elements of patterned ornament itself, as many art historians have eloquently described, require one's eyes to move, and often invite viewers to move bodily as well. Illuminated colours effect apparent ocular and spatial movements in relation to each other. This is well captured by a medieval poet describing how a double row of stained glass windows extend 'aenigmas' before one's eyes ('praetendit oculis aenigmata'), riddles of coloured glass that invite the eyes and mind to puzzle out their elements in their relationships with one another.<sup>5</sup> As with all puzzles, the solution, though also delightful, is less so than the riddle game itself.
- 4 Delight in parody and counterfact, indeed in all antithesis, mirroring the condition of created nature itself. Related to the delight in 'mirroring', it manifests itself stylistically almost more convincingly than theologically. Philosophical theology is ultimately uncomfortable with paradox; it seeks some sort of truth definition, however complex that may be, which unknots an antithesis. A great many church councils were concerned exactly with this task. The modes and colours of style, however, can just *be* various, variegated, antithetical, paradoxical, ironic, as parts in a whole aesthetic perception and experience. Like natural flux, they act in relation to each other to make a satisfactory harmony.

The medieval notion of intention, which is not only applied to artefacts but is a quality of any perceived sensory object, emphasizes, in both its scholastic and Augustinian analysis, the particularity of an object—that one is perceiving *this thing*. This is implicit in Augustine's understanding in *De trinitate*, of *intentio* as 'desire', for one's desire is caught and intended by some one particular thing. But to speak of the 'intention' of a rose—mentally grasping that one's image is from *this* rose and not an

<sup>4</sup> This effect has long been noticed, but can be explained geometrically as well (Teteriatnikov 2011). See Berliner 1945 for some other examples involving Resurrection images.

<sup>5</sup> Henry of Avranches, *Metrical Life of Saint Hugh*, 897. The poem is discussed further in this chapter.

Idea of Rose recognized in an instance of rose-ness—is not, I think, quite the same problem as speaking of the ‘intention’ of a poem.<sup>6</sup> There is a layer of complexity in an artefact that is not so difficult (at least practically) in a rose, and that has to do with the role of the artefact’s maker, the human author, artist, composer.

In its Romantic dress, the ‘intention of the author’ came to be wholly identified with the human maker. One stills hears the objection that someone’s interpretation (and by extension response of any sort other than strictly sensory) of an artefact can only be solipsistic because ‘we don’t know what the author intended’. Modernist New Criticism rebelled against that objection, deemed all concern with authorial intention to be ‘fallacy’, and thus banished the Author altogether, leaving only, so it seemed, the isolated artefact and its perceiver. But then the artefact itself was determined to be ‘mute’ in relation to the perceiver, enclosed entirely within a special world. So, with both author and artefact deprived of their own aesthetic intention, the critic reigned supreme. The other two participants in the old rhetorical triad were effectively silenced.

Classical and medieval rhetorical analysis dealt quite differently with this problem of intention in artefacts. As I have already noted, *intentio auctoris* refers most often to the intention of the work. The human author’s intention is available, but is important only as it is displaced into the work. The idea undoubtedly got much of its medieval prominence, as Alastair Minnis demonstrated, from the problems that authorship presented to biblical scholarship. But some of the elements in the biblical model came from rhetorical teaching, and the Bible books were always recognized as rhetorical composition, made up of tropes and figures intended by their human authors. These needed to be recognized and parsed stylistically. How the composer’s intention—which, remember, is a matter of goal and direction as well as content—is imparted to the made object is the task jointly of disposition and style. For these are the elements that both make a human artefact particular (giving it *intentio* as we experience it) and also intend it in terms of its internal directions and routes. Of course the *intentio* of yet a third party is equally important in rhetorical analysis, that of one perceiving it ‘bending’ in pleasure ‘towards’ the artefact.

The late antique and medieval theory of stylistic *ductus* offered a reasonably satisfactory bridge between these three sorts of intentions. Intention is primarily a matter of movement, and the initial artisan’s intentions (as a set of chosen movements) are conveyed within his artefact

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion of *intentio* in Chapter 2.

through its planned *ductus*. One experiencing the work does so through and among the various elements of its *ductus*, namely its formal and stylistic choices or *intentiones*. That experience is led (*ductus*) in the first instance not by moral ideas but by pleasure and delight, the desires (which Augustine called *intentiones*) of the perceiver responding to the ‘intentions’ (movements) of the style imparted to it by the ‘intentions’ (choices) of the artist. Is there absolute equivalence among these several *intentiones*, such that they are fully interchangeable? No. Stylistic *intentiones* are never for long composed only of *seria*—their conventional requirements, the serial ‘grammar’ of an art—they are ludic, polyfocal, ever varying and thus move us about in delight. The work is impelled by means of this variety, the necessary tug between *seria* and *ludus* that is fundamental to the experience of any well-crafted *aenigma*, in words or melodies or paint or stone. Why would one ever want finally to ‘solve’ it? The whole pleasure is in working through the *aenigma* itself. The very best puzzles contain many paths to their solution, precisely so that people can work them out on many different occasions.

#### MAGNIFICENCE AND MINIFICENCE, EXPANSION AND ABBREVIATION

Other principles of stylistic opposition work in this same way, their innate tensions being also the forward pulsations of those stylistic energies which move the work along, and thus move us through the work. They are as much a feature of the ‘spatial’ visual arts as of the supposedly time-based arts of music and literature. One such basic pair is expansion and abbreviation, ‘vel tractius ibis / vel cursim salies’, by which ‘you may advance more slowly or jump ahead quickly’, as Geoffrey of Vinsauf describes their use (*PN* 207–8). He numbers the tropes of abbreviation as fewer but no less important than the tropes of amplification. Bene of Florence outlined eight modes (as he calls them) of augmentation and eight of abbreviation, implicated in one another as presence and absence.<sup>7</sup> The principle is most familiar perhaps in music, when a single melody—even a single note—is treated as a trope of *brevitas* and amplified in a variety of ways. In chant, for example, the words are treated as though a phrase was itself a ‘brief’ trope, their sounds teased out and amplified extensively through the musical lines. The point is that one cannot have ‘brevity’ without

<sup>7</sup> Bene of Florence, *Candelabrum*, book 7; *PN* 203–736 also gives lengthy consideration to paired modes of abbreviation and amplification, though, inevitably, amplification takes up more lines.

amplification, nor ‘amplification’ without brevity—the one cannot even be recognized except from the other. ‘Prayer should be brief and unelaborated’, the Rule commands emphatically (‘*brevis debet esse et pura oratio*’, *RB* 20), not to get through it and on to something else, but in order that its expansion and amplification into every moment of a monastic day could be fully understood and savoured.

Related to this medieval taste for moving between *brevitas* and *amplificatio* is a pronounced fascination with miniaturization and magnification. Benedict’s vision of the greatness of God is as a point of light; Julian of Norwich saw the created world as the size of a small hazelnut. ‘Minificence’ also is an antique principle, as classicists have long realized. Indeed the philosophical trope of visionary *kataskopos*, the type of thought-experiment that involves a ‘gaze down’ over the spherical earth from a point in the heavens high above, is well known in ancient literature, pagan and biblical, and it was extensively imitated in medieval literature. It is also a principle of early terrestrial maps. In that experience, the miniaturizing of Earth is always remarked, ‘the little threshing-floor’ as Dante calls it, looking down from his point high in the heavens (*Paradiso*, 22.151). Indeed minificence, ‘making small’, is just as awe-inspiring as magnificence, ‘making large’, and the two often imply each other.<sup>8</sup> One unfortunate consequence of scholarly studies which fix on only one of such paired terms is that their necessary relationship is too often lost, and with it at least half of the pleasures involved. The pleasure of multifocal perspective often is made to contribute to a perception of magnificence, through copious descriptions of quite small decorated artefacts. This creates the verbal equivalent of magnificence in architecture, as a visually small thing is made apparently much greater in size, simply by having its details amplified. For example, here is a description of the burnished gold covered goblets, wonderfully fashioned into castle-like shapes, that are used at table for Belshazzar’s feast (Daniel 5:1–20), as described in the late 14th-century English poem, *Cleanness*:

<sup>8</sup> A recent study of the Iliac tablets develops this mode as a principle of antique style (Squire 2011). On the visual effect in medieval architecture, see Binski 2010a. Sauerländer 2003 discusses how motifs in miniature on reliquaries are magnified in portal statues—thus Chartres or Sainte-Chapelle is recognizable as a reliquary, just as reliquaries are recognizably churches. This distinctive movement between what is great and what is small—equally wonder-inspiring and working continuously off one another—is quite different from another sort of sublime, implicit in the trope of *diminutio* (‘belittling’), in which ‘making small’ is to diminish someone morally, as God does Job. Though the principle of playing ‘minitude’ against ‘magnitude’ seems common, there are (as with all variety) great differences in how that was applied and experienced.

Þe coperounes of þe couacles þat on þe cuppe reres  
 Wer fetysely formed out in fylloles longe;  
 Pinacles pyȝt þer apert þat profert bitwene,  
 And al bolled abof with braunches and leues,  
 Pyes and papejayes purtrayed withinne,  
 As þay prudly hade piked of pomgarnades;  
 For alle þe blomes of þe boȝes wer blyknande perles,  
 And alle þe fruyt in þo formes of flaumbeande gemmes,  
 Ande safres, and sardiners, and semely topace,  
 Alabaundarynes, and amaraunz, and amaffised stones,  
 Casydoynes, and crysolytes, and clere rubies,  
 Penitotes, and pynkardines, ay perles bitwene;  
 So trayled and tryfled atrauerce wer alle,  
 Bi vche bekyr and bolle, þe brurdes al vmbe;  
 Þe gobelotes of golde grauen aboute,  
 And fyoles fretted with flores and fleez of golde.

(*Cleanness*, 1461–76)

(The finials of the covers that rose up on top of the cup / were cleverly formed into tall turrets; / Pinnacles clearly set there projected between [them] / and all domed on top with branches and leaves / Magpies and parrots [were] portrayed within [them] / as though they had boldly pecked on pomegranates; / for all the blossoms of the boughs were shining pearls / and all the fruit in the forms of fiery gems / sapphires and sardonixes, and suitable topazes / alamandines, and emeralds and amethyst stones, / chalcedony, and chrysolites, and bright rubies, / peridots and pinkardines, with pearls between [them] all / In this way the rims of each beaker and bowl were trailed with vines with trefoil ornament all around horizontally; / The goblets engraved all about in gold / and vials with fretwork of gold flowers and flying insects.)

One is looking at late Gothic liturgical service vessels: chalices whose elaborate covers are worked into a tall pinnacled structure, with trailing foliage inhabited by birds and flowers all made from the polished gemstones so typical of late medieval metalworkers' craft. There are also flasks for oil and goblets decorated with gold fretwork fashioned with flowers and insects as one might see them in the margins of a late Gothic prayer-book, for instance the page of the Ormesby Psalter shown in Plate 8.

The liturgical connections are no accident. These goblets and chalices are not tableware for a human feast, no matter how luxurious, for these are among the vessels used within the Jerusalem Temple itself, and carried off as spoils by Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadanosor (Dan. 5). The poem does not ever make this connection explicit. We are supposed to recognize the liturgical vessels from the conventions used in their description and so connect the stories for ourselves. But first, before our intellectual

constructions, the copious description of these minute details catches and directs our attention. It employs a stylistic mode at once 'brief' (the small objects) and 'amplified', by the piled-on details that invite us to stay and ponder their ornament. For one must listen, at least with the mind's ear, to each name of those exotic gems, most though not all of which also form the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21), in order to see in the mind's eye every particular detail, perhaps as they would appear in an Apocalypse picture. The list of wonders seems almost too much for the objects to bear. At least one of these names—the last—is wholly mysterious, for the word 'pinkardine' is recorded in English only this one time; it has no known etymology and we do not know for sure what it means.<sup>9</sup>

In this way, the ekphrasis prepares us and moves us towards the next stage of the story. This little gem of a scene provides, for this poem, one of those 'resting places' that Peter of Celle spoke of in relation to reading the sacred page, where one can stay awhile in the copious meadows of mindful feelings. The next scene, 'sublime' even in the Romantic manner, is the terror-provoking disembodied hand that writes Belshazzar's fate upon the wall—in wholly unknown words that only Daniel can decipher. This, as it is told, is certainly a stylistically Grand, sublime scene of divine revenge for the sack of Jerusalem, but it seems to me that its grandeur is prepared and motivated through our enforced pondering upon the small wonders of the emperor's (stolen and misused) table service, including that mystery object, 'pinkardine'. An example of formal and stylistical *ductus* elegantly implanted in the artefact, in its movement the scene combines brevity and amplification, delicacy and grandeur, not in order to bring the poem to a halt nor to create a condition of unified rest, but to carry us further along in the poem towards its terrible end.

## ORDINARY BEAUTY, ALIEN UGLINESS

This poet is particularly good at this effect, though hardly alone among poets—and he has of course his equals in the other arts. But this is a craftsman whose work I particularly know, so I hope I can be forgiven another example. When the monstrously large green knight appears unarmed at King Arthur's New Year feast on his appropriately sized green horse, the poem stops and stares with the court at the apparition. With great delicacy, it pictures for us the knight's vesture and his saddle cloths, embroidered in green and gold with many tiny details—too many

<sup>9</sup> OED, s.v. *pinkardine*.

to tell of half of them—of birds and flying insects. The picture moves us closer to describe the hair of man and beast, the man's green hair fanning over his shoulders, his beard like a bush, the horse's green mane curled and combed and braided in knots of green hairs and gold thread. The horse's tail is similarly braided and tied in a bright green ribbon set with many stones, its end drawn into a knot with a thong, on which many gold bells are ringing. As we are drawn in to look ever more closely, to see even the little ringing golden bells in the horse's tail, suddenly the description draws back so we may see the peaceful rider's festival gifts, a holly branch and a 'huge, immensurate' axe (208), which is immediately described—one might say 'measured out'—in minute detail (190–5; 207–20). I do not wish to examine here the intricate play of movements throughout this riddle-like scene from high to low, fear to comedy, detail to overview, magnitude to minitude and back again. This ekphrasis employs a poly-focal perspective quite as stunning and inviting as that in Procopius's ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia. There are two points I want to emphasize though. First is the constant movement set up by the varying choices (*intentiones*) of stylistic colouration, lingering on this detail, passing over that, afar, up close, on man, on horse, on horse-man, choices which carry us forwards to the key focus (in this poem)—the huge axe.

The second is that this long, detailed description of nearly 100 lines is all of surfaces. Like his castle, which we later see, the Green Knight too seems cut out of paper (802), or perhaps he is one of those wondrous, 'ferly' automata that late medieval romances much fancied. He is an artefact, and his appearance in the court has the essential effect of causing our wonder—'What is it?' Unlike most medieval artefacts, he is, in the poem's final judgement, 'ugly' (441). We have examined the word used most often for pleasurable things, 'sweet', in the context of its opposites as well as synonyms, and I hope I have demonstrated that these are always found together in human experience. 'Ugly' is a word of a different sort, paired now of course always with 'beauty'. But as in the case of 'bitter' with 'sweet', so an examination of sensory or ordinary beauty may profit from considering its opposite. As the Parisian schoolman Alexander of Hales pointed out (c.1235–45), 'good things appear more lovely from being next to bad ones'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> '[B]ona pulchriora apparent ex adjunctione malorum' (Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, II, Q.64). His model for ordinary beauty, like Augustine's (whom he cites), is rhetorical: 'Sicut sermo bene compositus pulcher est quamvis quaedam syllabae desinant et alias oriantur' ('as a well-composed speech is beautiful when some syllables are lowered and some are spoken louder'). Rhetorical *compositio* refers to the metrical patterns of speech emphasized in oral delivery, evidently what Alexander is thinking of here. See De Bruyne 1998 [1946]: 2.111–12.

The word *beauté* (or *bealte*) exists in medieval Anglo-French, but it is not often used, certainly not of artefacts. The commonest positive terms are *swete* (see Chapter 3) and *plesaunte*. The use of 'ugly' is rare, and not recorded before the 14th century (neither, in English, is 'beauty'). It is from a Norse word, meaning 'feared', applied to monsters, aliens, foreigners, and all things unnatural. Not until the end of the century is it regularly opposed to humans 'beautiful' in appearance (women, children). In other European languages too, many words used for the opposite of beautiful first meant 'fearsome' and 'dreaded': for example, French *laide* is a Germanic (Frankish) word related to an Old English word, *lāþ*, 'loathely, horrid', applied to creatures like the monster Grendel in *Beowulf*.<sup>11</sup> Adjectives for what stinks, rotten, is dead and putrid—'foul'—are also used as opposites of 'beautiful'; an example is the Latin adjective *foedus*, associated with offensive odours, decay and rottenness, and the stinking miasmas that were thought to cause killing fevers.

I am not arguing that 'ugly' was a concept unknown before the late Middle Ages, for this is clearly not true. But the words chosen to express it suggest, I think, some interesting features not only about 'ugly' but about 'beautiful' too. When not expressed simply as beauty's negation—*deformis*, for example—these words have to do with things unnatural, alien, and thus fearsome and dreadful, like monsters. The Green Knight's headless body is 'ugly', a word that can be applied to dead bodies—except in this case the body is not dead: it picks up its head and speaks. That dreadful alienness is what makes it particularly ugly instead of wondrous. Similarly, the lavish description of the details of the knight's appearance at court is couched in language that would lead us to judge it delightful, pleasurable (as wonders so often are, especially at Christmas games in romances), successively catching our attention as its wonders unfold in all their harmonious variety. The knight's overall green colour is almost domesticated, tamed and made familiar to us through the copious detail. Even that huge axe diverts but does not stop the flow of the previous description. At no time can we look underneath these surfaces, whether of body, clothes,

<sup>11</sup> Buck 1949: 16.82; *OED* s.vv. *ugly*, *foul*, *huge*. Many European languages used words formed on the model of 'not beautiful', such as Latin *deformis* and Greek *dysmorphos*. Old English had *unwulitig*, 'unpleasing'. Another English possibility is *foul*, 'rotten, stinking', a word with many Germanic cognates, and cognate as well with Latin *putere*. In its medieval contexts, this word is always associated with sensory offensiveness rather than with fear-someness. *Huge* is a rare word at the time of this poem (c.1390). Likely from a medieval French adjective, *ahoge*, meaning 'very large', it has no other cognates or any known etymon. As its readers have often noted, the *Gawain* poet collected many rarely used, often northern dialect words that would not have been understood by southern English audiences, though the majority consensus of scholars now is that the poems were composed in or near London, even possibly for Richard II's court.

horse, or weapon, nor does the detail hint of obscurities. With the Green Knight, what you see is what you get, green colour, great axe, and all—until suddenly wonder turns to terror, his head rolls underfoot while his body stands bleeding and ‘ugly’.

Another unusual creature, hovering between ugly and lovely, is described in a very different sort of late medieval work. She is found in the late medieval (1463) French courtly *débat* on rhetoric called *Les douze dames de rhétorique*.<sup>12</sup> The text as we have it has three authors, serving in the courts of Jean II of Bourbon and Philippe le Bon of Burgundy, who wrote sections of the work in the form of letters commenting on the topic of rhetoric and other matters. The core of the text, written somewhat earlier than the rest, and so serving as the main occasion for the debate, is a poem by Georges Chastelain, in the form of a dozen portraits in verse, together with paintings of what he identified as the twelve aspects of literary composition. Each of the twelve handmaidens (‘dames’) speaks a verse-portrait, called an *enseigne* (lesson), telling who she is and what she does for ‘Lady Rhetoric’. Each *enseigne* is introduced by her painted portrait. Chastelain was responsible for both the poems and the paintings.

Last in the series is the finished work, ‘Glorieuse Achevissance’ (‘wonderful completion’). Her painted portrait is reproduced here in colour (Plate 9), for the range and variety of its colours are essential to understanding what makes her beautiful. Notice that she has her blue robe draped decorously over her lap in order to show off her golden skin. It is clearly her skin, not another garment, as the fully articulated muscles of her legs and feet and abdomen, her visible nipples and navel all indicate. Notice also the bright whiteness—*candidus*—of her face and hands. Notice also the lavishly various patterns of the columns, walls, and floor of the structure in which she is enthroned, the detailed landscape behind, the embroidered textures of her throne and the banner she holds, the elaborate metalwork of her crowns, both that of her head-dress and the diadem she holds in her right hand. One’s eye, perhaps first caught by the central figure, soon looks elsewhere, to detail after detail, and can easily miss, amid all the patterning, her name written in gold across the pavement behind her.

Under this wondrous product, towards which the eleven other *dames* have worked, is written her *enseigne*, a poem of three stanzas. It starts with

<sup>12</sup> On the textual and historical contexts of the poem, see the introduction to the critical edition by Cowling (2002). The authorship is complicated: see also Cynthia Brown 1987. Cowling 2000 gives a good account of the poem’s final manuscript, Cambridge University Library, MS Nn 3.2, from which he made his edition.

a Latin motto derived from Psalm 44, verses 3 and 13, the psalm celebrating variety as both an artistic and ecclesiological principle.<sup>13</sup>

Et moy de moy que doi ge dire,  
De propre los que puis je escrire?  
Sinon que qui d'oeil me remire,  
Et gette regart sur mon corps,  
S'il est de jasse ou de porphire,  
Ne puis faillir dont à reluire,  
Et que cuer noble fruit ne tire  
De la beauté de mon dehors,  
Qui sueffre qu'on me tourne et vire,  
Qu'on voie ainsy qu'au doy eslire  
S'en moy a fronce ou à redire,  
Ne chose digne de remors,  
Car, pour à verité souffire,  
Moy mesmes n'y puis contredire,  
Mais belle ou laide je desire  
Qu'on en face les vrais recors.

(And I, what may I say of myself, / In my own praise what may I write? / Unless that when a person considers me with his eye, / And casts his gaze over my body, / Whether it be of jasper or porphyry, / I could not fail then to gleam brightly, / And a noble heart to draw fruit / from the beauty of my outside, / Which permits someone to turn and twist me around, / So that one may gaze as if examining / Whether in me there is a wrinkle or something to be corrected, / Or something of which to be ashamed; / For to satisfy truth, / I cannot dispute this matter with myself, / But beautiful or ugly I desire / That true reports be made.)<sup>14</sup>

The gaze of her perceiver makes her shine brightly—the grammar is clear about this—as if she were of jasper or porphyry, two notably dark marbles that when polished brilliantly reflect a particular light to a receptive eye. Just like those marbles, her beauty lies in her surface: she invites us to turn her body about and examine her the way an expert artisan might a workshop product, for flaws, errors, or some detail not quite perfect. Her golden body and white face and hands mark her as completely artificial.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> 'Vultum meum admirabuntur divites plebis, quia speciosa in forma pre filiabus [sic] hominum' ('the rich among the people will admire my countenance, because [I am] beautiful in form before the children of men'). Each of these speeches has a Latin motto, mainly from the Bible; several are from Psalm 44.

<sup>14</sup> My translation, with many thanks to Jeanette Beer and Helen Swift for help.

<sup>15</sup> The use of gold and ivory may allude to the particular excellence of the ancient sculptor, Phidias, whose famous statues of Zeus and Athena were of gold and ivory (Pliny, *Natural History*, 34.54). Gold and ivory were always materials of special refinement. Thanks to Stephen Antonakos for this suggestion.

The other eleven *dames*, the artisans, are painted with pink cheeks and human skin (if pale, as befits aristocrats). ‘Glorieuse achevissance’ alone is rendered in gold and ivory like an especially refined statue, and only she is nude.

As with the artefacts with which I began this book, the cross of St Eloy and that of the *Dream of the Rood*, so this product of human art at first presents a conundrum. Her aesthetic and moral value is not at all evident from the details of the artefact itself, including her portrait. But, as she says she cannot in truth judge herself. We must examine her carefully and assess her, for she may be ‘belle ou laide’, as she teasingly says. In the second stanza she speaks on her own behalf (for as she has said, she cannot ‘speak against’ herself, *se contredire*):

En moy a beauté impollue  
Formosité oblectant veue,  
Et dont l’inspection ague  
Donne saveur e nourissance.

(In me there is pure beauty / Loveliness delighting sight, / the careful inspection of which / gives flavour and nourishment.)

The beauty of Glorieuse Achevissance is proved by tasting her, for she has *savour* as well as *nourissance*—and thus her beauty for us can become a form of *sapientia*, or *savoir*. Her *enseigne* underscores her material refulgence (‘ma reluisance’, 25.24)—she gleams so brightly that she dazzles and darkens our eyes—and invites us to admire the ‘subtile apparissance’ (skilful appearance) of her robe (25.28). And, she says, if we turn our intelligence (‘engin’, 25.31) towards her, our eye will take joy and ‘flourishing’ from her.<sup>16</sup> But the onus is still on her judges (us) to determine what to make of her, either an uncomfortably foreign (*laide*) gold and ivory statue, or food (*savour*) for true thought (*savoir*). Her central throne and blue robe might even, as contrafactum, bring to mind the Virgin, as her nudity does Venus. She has begun the debate, speaking for herself, but in the tradition of *débat*, she has implicitly invited someone else to make a counter-argument, so that the group may decide after arguing all sides of the matter whether she is *belle ou laide*. The crowning achievement of all Rhetoric’s ladies is to make for us a delightful, admirably crafted puzzle for our senses and a fruitful conundrum for our intellects.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ‘Que l’oeil s’i foiblist et esbleue / Par hauteesse de ma value; / Mais quant engin s’i esvertue, / Il y prent joye et flourishing’ (25.29–32).

<sup>17</sup> *Subtilis* is a value produced by fine craft skills and marvellous technical mastery, whose effects are always illusionistic and contrived by art. See my further discussion of medieval *trompe l’œil* effects later in the chapter.

This excursion into ugliness demonstrates two essential points about medieval ordinary beauty, that it is grounded in what is familiar to human sensory experiences (which does not exclude wonder or magnificence), and that it is all about surfaces (*subtile apparissance*). Blood also has a role in beauty and ugliness: notice that the Green Knight becomes ugly as he loses his blood, that Glorieuse Achevissance has no blood at all in her face or hands or skin. And with these requirements of beauty in mind, I will return to the Latin term at the focus of this chapter, *pulc(h)er* (noun form, *pulchritudo*).

## BEAUTY IS SKIN DEEP

*Pulc(h)er* is a word without a securely known etymology, a fact that was remarked even in antiquity. No one knows where it came from still. The *h* is an unsupported Greekism, which Cicero himself noted, deploring the change (*Orator* 160). It was once suggested by Indo-Europeanists that the root is Etruscan, but there is no attestation, and thus no proof of this. According to recent dictionaries, the closest cognates in Indo-European languages are words (often ancient) meaning 'variegated' or 'speckled' (Sanskrit), or 'coloured', especially 'red' (Russian and other Slavic languages), and an Old High German word for a 'trout' (Buck 1949: 16.85). It is always associated as well with pleasing and pretty surfaces.

In antiquity, the added *h* in the Latin word *pulcher* supported a Greek etymology, known to be false but widely credited nonetheless, which derived *pulcher* from Greek *poly-chroia*, 'many-coloured surfaces or skin'; *chroia* is from *chrōs*, 'skin' (Maltby 1991).<sup>18</sup> *Chroia* can itself also mean 'skin' and 'surface', especially the appearance of skin. *Chrōma*, 'colour', is from this same root, a link well-known in antiquity.<sup>19</sup> So even though the ancients knew there was no etymology, they nonetheless felt it necessary to give *pulcher* one, and the false one they gave it actually seems to have been fairly true to the originating Indo-European concept. *Pulcher* is strongly associated with surfaces, including skin and hair, and with the word 'colour', itself cognate with the English word 'hull', the covering of a grain.<sup>20</sup> (As Greek *chrōma*, as we've just seen, is related to skin, *chrōs*.) Since allegory was counted as one of the 'colours' of rhetoric, one may readily understand how, in exegesis, reading the allegory of Scripture was

<sup>18</sup> See also Monteil 1964: 72–4.

<sup>19</sup> These are the definitions given in Liddell & Scott.

<sup>20</sup> OLD, s.v. *color*; see Buck 1949: 15.61, who relates it more distantly to verbs such as Latin *celare*, 'to cover'.

described as removing the ‘hull’ or verbal ‘colours’ of the text to find the grain within. Isidore does not use the ancient etymology for *pulcher* but he preserves the essence if not the false Greek: ‘*Pulcher* is derived from the appearance of the skin, [a word for] which is *pellis*: later the word was applied generally.’ Using as his chief examples phrases from Virgil’s description of Aeneas, after his mother Venus has spruced him up so that he appears to Dido like a shining artefact himself (*Aeneid*, 1.589–92), Isidore locates *pulchritudo* either in the face or hair, eyes, radiant skin, or in height or body proportions. *Pulchritudo* is all in appearances; the lines from Virgil nowhere use the actual word, but Isidore and his audiences understood them to define aesthetic beauty.<sup>21</sup> Uguccione’s *Derivationes* gives Isidore’s etymology, relating *pulcher* to *pellis*. But he also relates the transitive verb *pello*, *pulsus* (‘to move’ or ‘affect’) to *pulcher* and *pellis*. This is quite wrong factually, but a significant link to have made, for something is *pulcher* only when it moves and affects us. It emphasizes not only that ordinary beauty is at the surface of something, but that beauty is no transcendent quality. It requires a human being to be moved to say something is beautiful.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most commonly used synonyms for *pulcher* is *venustus* (*venustas*). In antiquity, this word was recognized (correctly) to be derived from Venus, the goddess of perfect beauty and also of lascivious sexual pleasures. One would expect that a word with such a disreputable lineage would be banished from Christian discourse, but in fact *venustas* is in common use throughout the Christian Middle Ages. A quick search online of the ‘Patrologia latina’ and ‘Corpus of Latin Texts’ databases shows well over a thousand uses in patristic and medieval writings, none worrying about a connection with Venus. Perhaps this is because *venustus* was associated more directly during the Middle Ages with blood.<sup>23</sup> Even in Ciceronian rhetoric, proper *venustas* meant infusing stylistic colouration

<sup>21</sup> ‘*Pulcher* ab specie cutis dictus, quod est *pellis*: postea transit hoc nomen in genus. Nam *pulchritudo* hominis aut in vultu est, ut “os humerosque deo similis” [*Aen.* 1.589], aut in capillis, ut “namque ipse decoram / caesariem” [*Aen.* 1. 589–90], aut in oculis, ut “laetos oculis adflarat honores” [*Aen.* 1.591], aut in candore, ut “quale manus addunt ebori decus” [*Aen.* 1.592], aut in lineamentis [citing Cicero, *Verrine Orations*, 2.36] . . . aut in proceritate, ut Turnus [citing *Aen.* 11.683]’ (*Etym.* 10.203). Isidore’s link of *pulcher* to *pellis* (skin, hide), though not possible linguistically, is not so far wrong conceptually.

<sup>22</sup> Uguccione, *Derivationes*, s.v. *pello* (P 52). The question of whether or not Beauty is a transcendental quality, directly predicable of Being, lies at the heart of many debates in aesthetic philosophy especially after Kant. O’Reilly 2007 reviews some of the issues.

<sup>23</sup> Venus had a connection indirectly with blood, but her chief link was to sexual activity, via her genitive formation, *Veneris* (exactly the sort of adolescent wordplay encouraged in Latin schooling). She was born of the ocean ‘spume’ resulting after Jove castrated Saturn, and such spume (sperm) biologically is a product of refined blood (explained in *Etym.* 8.11.76–8). A delicious pun also developed linking *venery* (sex) and

into a work like healthy blood, rather than smearing it on like rouge (*De orat.* 3.199). Isidore makes the connection of blood and stylistic *venustus* explicit: 'Venustus, pulcher, a venis, id est sanguine' ('*Venustus*, beautiful, from *venis*, that is from blood') (*Etym.* 10.277). Blood is warm, and (as Bene of Florence wrote) we heat up as we become persuaded of something. Isidore says that 'sanguis' is so called in Latin because it is 'suavis', and all people in whom the sanguine humour dominates are pleasant and agreeable ('dulces et blandi sunt').<sup>24</sup> The interpenetration of medical and aesthetic vocabulary that we have noted before seems evident again in these Isidorean etymologies, technically incorrect for the most part but culturally truthful.

Another common synonym of *pulcher*, *formosus*, is also a word without a clear etymology but what there is again seems associated by Isidore with blood. *Forma*, the noun, is perhaps really related to Greek *morphē*, but the link is regarded as questionable linguistically (Monteil 1964: 23–30). Isidore does not mention this possibility, but instead links *forma* to *pulcher*, via blood. This link is roundabout, but Isidore soldiers on. Since 'of old' *forma* was said to be hot and fervid, and *fervens*, as a heated condition, excites the blood, and blood gives rise to beauty—'fervor arouses blood [and] blood beauty'.<sup>25</sup> Another common synonym of *pulcher* is *speciosus*, from the noun *species*, pleasing 'appearance' and 'aspect' (*Etym.* 10.243). Our gaze (*species*) can only grasp the surfaces of things.

*Pulcher* has several opposites, Isidore says. A common one is *turpis*, 'torpid', without movement, for, as he says, something *turpis* 'torpeat' 'is still', deriving the word from the verb *torpeo*, 'to be inactive'. In classical Latin *turpis* had strong ethical connotations, 'disgraceful', 'shameless', and 'base', as in lower class; it kept these in medieval Latin. Isidore also links *turpis* to *informus*, 'lacking form' (this link is also common in ancient usage). Something *turpis*, then, is bloodless (because lacking *fervor* and *forma*), vitiated (*torpid*), and without colour, bodily as well as morally.<sup>26</sup> Another opposite of *pulcher* encountered often in literary writing is *foedus*, meaning 'ugly' but especially 'putrid', perhaps reflecting a (mistaken but common) conflation in Late Latin with *foetidus*, 'fetid'. Isidore associates

*venery* (hunting), much exploited in the playful margins of medieval English Latin books—no *taedium* there.

<sup>24</sup> 'Sanguis Latine vocatus quod suavis sit, unde et homines, quibus dominatur sanguis, dulces et blandi sunt' (*Etym.* 4.4.5). See the discussion of styles in Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> 'Formosus a forma dictus. Formum enim veteres calidum et fervens dixerunt. Fervor enim sanguinem movet, [et] sanguis pulchritudinem' (*Etym.* 10.99).

<sup>26</sup> 'Turpis, quod sit informis et torpeat' ('*Turpis*, if it be unformed and is inactive') (*Etym.* 10.273). See also *OLD*, s.v. *turpis*, for the word's classical meanings.

*foedus* with goats, who smell particularly rank, and also (as now) with putrefaction (*Etym.* 10.100). A third opposite—used in contexts of sound, touch, and taste—is *asper*, ‘harsh’, ‘astringent’, and ‘frigid’. Notice the range of these opposites, taking in all five of the senses. Notice as well how these words for ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’ are associated with heat and motion (beautiful) or torpor and cold (ugly).

*Pulcher* also is paired with the word *sepulchrum*, a particularly effective rhyming oxymoron that occurs in some classical Latin burial inscriptions. It is, perhaps surprisingly, not common in medieval texts before the 15th century. In a Carolingian verse account of the life of the 7th-century abbot St Léger, his bones are said to be buried in a beautiful tomb (*‘pulchro tumulata sepulchro’*).<sup>27</sup> The words were associated with the ancient Mausoleum, described by Isidore (*Etym.* 15.11) as a *‘sepulchrum’* of great beauty (*‘mirae pulchritudinis’*). The 15th-century convention of *transi* tombs, juxtaposing the decaying body below with the person laid out in honour above, may be in part a humanist reference to this classical motto, as also a taste for colourfully painting, sometimes even gilding, the consuming worms and toads depicted on the decaying body, linking *pulchrum* and *sepulchrum* in a single arresting visual image.<sup>28</sup> *Pulchrum* and *sepulchrum* are found linked in medieval texts sometimes via an alternative reading of Matthew 23:27: *‘vae vobis scribae et Pharisei hypocritae qui similes estis sepulchris dealbatis quae a foris hominibus videntur pulchra intus sunt plena ossibus mortuorum’* (‘Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, who are like whited sepulchres, which appear beautiful outside, but within are full of bones of the dead’).<sup>29</sup>

*Speciosus*, *venustus*, and *pulcher*, in medieval writing, occur often with the word *decor* and the verb *deceat*. Isidore associated *venustus* (the noun) specifically with architectural ornament. In his discussion of buildings, he writes, *‘Venustus* is something which is added to buildings for ornament and decoration, such as ceiling panels picked out with gold and slabs of rare marble and paintings [fashioned] of several colours.’<sup>30</sup> The word is also commonly used of orations: *venustus eloquii*, giving the basic bones of arguments their decorated ‘skin’, as indeed is the case with ‘Glorieuse

<sup>27</sup> ‘Vita metrica beati Leudegarii martyris’ (MGH *Poetae*, 3.2.485).

<sup>28</sup> On *transi* tombs see Binski 1996; on the depiction and painting of decay imagery in such tombs, see Ousterwijk 2005.

<sup>29</sup> The text is cited from Gregory the Great’s commentary on 1 Kings 1:3 (PL 79.29; similarly, on 1 Kings 9.13, PL 79.259). The far commoner reading for ‘pulchra’ was ‘speciosa’, as in the present Vulgate text. See the variants for this verse recorded in the ‘Vetus latina’ database (available by subscription from Brepols).

<sup>30</sup> ‘Venustus est quicquid illud ornamenti et decoris causa aedificiis additur, ut tectorum auro distincta laquearia et pretiosi marmoris crustae et colorum picturae’ (*Etym.* 19.11).

Acheissance'. The Green Knight's eloquence, so much more elegant than Arthur's tongue-tied courtiers, is the aural expression of his decorated appearance. *Venustas* often occurs in patristic writings about the Hexameron, the Six Days of creation—during which, following the method of rhetorical composition, God first invents the materials of the world, ordains them (*dispositio*), and then gives the world its skin (*venustas*) and decoration (*ornamentis et decoris causa*). Used not only of architecture and oratory, *venustas* also is frequently used in writing on music—one can speak of the *venustas* of a musical composition as of an oration, meaning both how it is 'set out' and how it is 'clothed'—for the one articulates the other: *decor* and *ornamentum* both combine meanings of usefulness and decoration that we have separated in modern English (which makes them now very hard to translate adequately).

So the common beauty words have to do with surfaces, especially with colours. Aristotle, *De sensu et sensato*, 3 (439a), speaking of how and what our eyes see, says that basically what we see is colour, the surface of the object seen. Its potential to be seen is its colour: 'This', Aristotle says, 'is why the Pythagoreans called the surface of a body its colour.' So everything that has a surface has colour—this colour articulates, indeed it comprises, what we take in when we see something (remember that *candidus*, 'bright white', and *niger*, 'black', are colour words too). Colour is made perceptible by light (fire or flux in the air or what Aristotle called, mysteriously, 'the diaphanous'). The various colours are ratios, like musical sounds (and like flavours): they are mixed in proportions of opposite qualities along a scale. There are an indefinite number on the perceptible scale, which (for Aristotle) was bounded by the opposites, white and black. But definite colour ratios are most pleasing to us (as is also the case with sound and flavour): purple and red are distinctive colours along the scale (they are not jumbles). As the median colour, green was also much commended, as delightful and also healthful. Aristotle employed only a white-to-black scale, but his commentator, Avicenna, identified three separate colour scales: one from black to white (which included yellows), but also one of reds and purples, and one of greens and blues.<sup>31</sup> Not everyone accepted this. But all the commentators continue to agree that the surfaces are coloured and that what human eyes see are only those surface colours, which articulate and also cover over whatever they enclose.

<sup>31</sup> Colour scales from antiquity through Newton and beyond are discussed by Gage 1993: 165–76; for medieval ideas, see esp. 165–6, and also 227–9, on the idea of 'colour harmonies' based on the principle of 'proportionality' thought to be shared by music and painting.

Colours are distinguished by value properties (that is, light and dark) more than hue. This is very odd to us, but needs to be kept in mind. 'Brightness' and 'dimness' are important properties in determining colour. Well before the 13th-century interest in the physics of light and perspective, colour was associated with fire as well as sunlight. Isidore links *color* to heat, of fire and the sun: 'Colours are so called because they are brought into being by the heat [*calor*] of fire or by the sun.' (Or, he adds as an alternative, perhaps to the verb *colo*, 'cultivate', since painting is a craft of fine detail—we will return to this link.) Colours are either natural or man-made, by mixing. He gives the example of painting, that painters start off with simple colours and then build up more complexity. Also, they begin with underdrawing and shading (*umbra*) and then add their colours, 'observing the compositional order of their art'.<sup>32</sup> Not only does this physics of colour give light, illumination, a defining role—something that many historians have emphasized—but it also emphasizes the centrality of mixtures, shadow with colour, colours with one another. Like Aristotle (and Aquinas, commenting on him), Avicenna also thought that all qualities were mixtures: there is no 'pure' black or 'pure' white, even sunlight, and most agreed with him. The commentators are also much taken with the phenomenon of iridescence, like the feathers of doves and peacocks, and that of white sunlight splitting into colours, as in the rainbow.<sup>33</sup>

*Colour* is a word used for all sorts of surfaces, musical and verbal as well as visual. Greek *chrōma* is associated with all the arts, and the same is true of Latin *color*. Which is interesting because it seems to confirm the priority of the notion of 'being at the surface', and of 'covering', over emphasizing differences in pigments, which are central to our notion of colour. The late Roman rhetoric of Sulpicius Victor notes, following Cicero, that the Latin word *decorum* translates an essential concept in Greek rhetoric, *prepon*, the arrangement and execution (*glorieuse achevissance*) of a composition, which the various rhetorical *colores* (tropes and figures) must pleasingly and persuasively set out (*Institutiones. oratoriae* 15; RLM 320.32). *Pulchritudo* is a

<sup>32</sup> 'Colores autem dictos quod calore ignis vel sole perficiuntur, sive quod initio colabantur ut summae subtilitatis existerent' ('or because they were cultivated first so that they might appear of the finest crafted work') (*Etym.* 19.17). 'Vnde et nunc pictores prius umbras quasdam et lineas futurae imaginis ducent, deinde coloribus complent, tenentes ordinem inventae artis' ('even now painters first draw some shadowing and lines for a future image, then they fill it in with colours, following the sequence for composing of their art') (*Etym.* 19.16).

<sup>33</sup> Ancient and medieval colour theories and practices are complex, and often very technical. A most helpful, reliable guide is Gage 1993, to which I am much indebted, and recommend to any who wish to learn more about colour and culture not only in the Middle Ages but much later too. On the medieval lexicon of colours, see Dronke 1972.

quality of the skin of any artistic composition and, like all sensations, it has its proper meaning only as we experience it in something to which we give our attention. As Thomas Aquinas said with customary brevity, 'those things are called beautiful which, being seen, are pleasing'.<sup>34</sup>

## PUZZLES FOR THE EYES

In my discussion of 'variety', I examined a part of the Byzantine courtier Procopius's ekphrastic description of Hagia Sophia, in particular his polyfocal perspective in which, as he says, the proliferation of details 'do not permit the spectator to linger much over the study of any one of them, but each detail attracts the eye irresistibly to itself'. One's gaze is constantly moved about among the details, awakening wonder and awe, but is also perplexed. Procopius adds, 'No matter how much [beholders] concentrate their attention on this side and that, and examine everything with contracted eyebrows, they are unable to understand the craftsmanship and always depart from there amazed by the perplexing spectacle'.<sup>35</sup> Nor was this experience confined to Hagia Sophia. Another late antique church description praises the same sort of response: 'When you enter, you will be staggered by the variety of the spectacle. Eager as you are to see everything at once, you will depart not having seen anything properly, since your gaze darts hither and thither in your attempt not to leave aught unobserved'.<sup>36</sup> Polyfocal perspective is a feature of many medieval interiors that sought to capture the splendour of variegated marble.

Most modern commentary has concentrated on the opulence and amplitude of these late antique descriptions, befitting—as many have said—both the emperor who commissioned them (Justinian) and the (neoplatonist) God worshipped in them. Undoubtedly this is correct, as also is the emphasis they place upon the wonder and awe they inspire. But it is a particular sort of awe, I think. It is not the Romantic awe that overbears and diminishes those experiencing it, but rather marvel that attracts us because we are puzzled, that makes us wonder how it is made. We are drawn *into* these spaces, not shut out from their mystery nor reduced by their magnificence. We are surely asked to admire God through their means, but first of all to admire the craftsmanship of the

<sup>34</sup> '[P]ulchra enim dicuntur, quae visa placent' (STI, Q.5, a.4).

<sup>35</sup> Procopius, 'De aedificiis', 1.47–9, trans. Mango, 1986 [1972]: 75.

<sup>36</sup> Choricus, *Laudatio Marciani*, 1.23, trans. Mango, 1986 [1972]: 61. The ekphrasis is of the church of St Sergius at Gaza, composed early in Justinian's reign (Mango 1986 [1972]: 60).

human artisans, the skill of the marble workers, the greatly various colours of the stones they have wrought so marvellously (each identified by the location in which it was quarried). One can understand why ancient literary etymologies linked *color* to *colo*, *cultus*, 'cultivated', because the finest craftsmanship is expressed in the finished surfaces of artefacts. The materials no longer look like themselves—'the mason weaving together with his hands thin slabs of marble, has figured upon the walls connected arcs laden with fruit, baskets, and leaves . . . The twining vine with shoots like golden ringlets winds its curving path and weaves a spiral chain of clusters.'<sup>37</sup> The emphasis is all on the illusionistic effect of the craft, the delightful conundrum presented by such a persuasive work of *pietra dura*. It offers a puzzle not unlike that presented by the crafty artifice of the Green Knight in Arthur's court, or for that matter the grapes painted by Zeuxis, art in which 'the work exceeds its material', *materiam superabat opus*.

Closely related to the emphasis placed on craft mastery by associating *color* with *cultus* (*Etym.* 18.17.1) is *subtilitas*, 'fine work'. Isidore says that the effects of colours (he is thinking of architecture and painting, but the same is true of the colours of music and rhetoric) were cultivated at first 'so that the very best of skilled work [*summae subtilitatis*] might be created'.<sup>38</sup> The Latin word actually is a shortened form of *sub-te(x)la*, *te(x)la*, 'something woven', from *texo*, 'weave'. (Greek *poiein*, 'make, embroider', carries the same general idea.) The Vulgate Bible uses *subtiles* for fine woven cloths (for example, Ezek. 16:10). The word *subtile* (Latin *subtilis*, ME *sotil*) is not an aesthetic word per se, but a valuation of deeply skilled and learned craftsmanship, in the same conceptual category as Middle English 'mystery', meaning 'the skills and knowledge particular to a learned craft', a master's craft secrets.<sup>39</sup> Vitruvius used various forms of *subtilis* often to mean 'thin, fine', but also as a positive judgement of refined artisanry ('*subtilitas artificis*': *De architectura* 7.5.7). The adjective occurs regularly as well in music theory (as in rhetoric) to discuss vocal tones, *subtilis* being 'refined' (like the voices of children, women, and the sick, Boethius says: *De musica* 5.4), contrasted to *gravis*, the fuller voices of adult men. *Subtilis*

<sup>37</sup> Paul the Silentiary, 'Descriptio S. Sophiae', 647, trans. Mango, 1986: 86. This poem was recited in the church in 563, soon after its second consecration.

<sup>38</sup> 'Colores autem dictos . . . quod initio colabantur ut summae subtilitatis existerent' (*Etym.* 19.17.1).

<sup>39</sup> The Latin means 'attenuated, stretched out' and is associated by Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* 12.10.58–9) with the Plain style of rhetoric (Greek *ischnón*, 'thin': see Chapter 3), which, when masterfully constructed and delivered, gives the subtle appearance of being directly 'to the point' and 'simply put'. Isidore repeats this identification (*Etym.* 3.20.10–11; cf. *Etym.* 2.17 and 10.260). 'Subtle' is regularly opposed to 'stout' or 'thick', *spissus* in Latin, in Greek *hadron*, 'stout', used for the Grand style.

is a value of fine craft skills and marvellous technical mastery, prompting in the perceiver the question 'How is this done?' as well as the judgement 'How wonderful'. Its effects are illusionistic and artfully contrived, not meanly to deceive but to persuade to some credit-worthy belief.

*Subtilis*, in medieval Latin, always has to do with fine workmanship and design, especially demonstrated in multicoloured, illusionistic effects. These are, of course, compatible with the aesthetic of *trompe l'œil* illusion, which we have seen is a marker of especially superior craft, and, as with Zeuxis's grapes, the success of the effect is measured by its persuasiveness to its judges, its perceivers. In a fine essay on the word's medieval French descendent, *soutil*, Sylvia Huot cites an assessment of how *soutil* narrative craft is superior to logical, academic philosophy for articulating greater truths. Fables allow one 'to create in order to speak more subtly, more pleasingly, and more appealingly, for things which are subtly composed or said make the understanding [*l'entendement*, also 'listening'] marvel, and in consequence enjoy, for marvellous things are by nature more enjoyable [*delitables*].'<sup>40</sup> One should also add (on the authority of Aristotle, as we have already seen) that philosophizing began with wondering. And true wisdom, as we have also seen from the greater authority of the Bible itself, is *sapida*, 'tasty' and 'delicious', *delitable*.

Marbles were particularly prized for just this feature, their greatly various colours and the ways in which, when cut and polished with skill, the patterns of the stone seemed to form figures (and the various stones sometimes did have by nature images of creatures in them, as Albertus Magnus had remarked).<sup>41</sup> One can puzzle over them endlessly—'the eye does not know where to look first'. Paul the Silentiary marvels at the flecked surfaces of some marbles, like stars and flowers on their darker-coloured surfaces, as well as the veins in lighter marbles, like lines in paintings. The marble panel shown in Plate 6, which is set, among many others greatly varying in their hues and patterns, into the eastern wall of the entrance porch to Hagia Sophia, is an example of the puzzling intricacy of their crafted materials, which draws one's speculation,

<sup>40</sup> '[F]aire pour parler plus subtilement, plus plaisamment, et plus delectablement, car les choses qui sont subtilement faintes ou dites font plus esmerveiller l'entendement, et par consequant deliter, car les choses esmerveillables sont par nature delitables' (Huot 1993: 206). The quote is from an extensive commentary in French on *Les échecs amoureux*, a work of about 1400, by Évrard de Conty, physician to Charles VI of France. But displays of any learned art, including logic, argumentation, and medicine could be and were described as admirably 'subtle'.

<sup>41</sup> See Albertus Magnus, *Mineralia* 2.3.1–2. The beauty of marbles admired for their variety of colours, their markings, and the 'pictures' they seem to make, is a standard trope of architectural ekphrasis since classical times. The literature on the topic, both historical and contemporary, is vast; a place to begin is Greenhalgh 2008 and see also Pentcheva 2011.

sensory and intellectual, rather like a modern Rorschach blot. Medieval descriptions of marbles are acute as to their colours, even when the marble is white, for it can be a yellowish white, or rosy, or brilliant Parian stone.<sup>42</sup> They are quarried from so many different places that some medieval lists read like a sort of atlas, a *geographia* or *mappa mundi* in marbles, expressing the diversity of the Church itself, the 'living stones', to which they were sometimes likened (Binski 2004: 52–62).<sup>43</sup> Isidore devoted a chapter to marbles (*Etym.* 16.5), which he called the greatest of stones because of its range of colours and markings; his catalogue of marbles details where they are quarried as well as what they look like. Importantly, however, neither in the Byzantine descriptions nor in Isidore are the particular marbles allegorized or spiritualized. It is their sensory effect, the plenitude of their colours, their variegated surfaces, and their mysterious details alone that are emphasized in the workmanship of the marbles as well as in their conventional descriptions. And when actual marble was not available, columns were sometimes painted to resemble them, as the comparison of marble column shafts in the nave of San Miniato al Monte in Florence (Plate 10) and the faux marble columns of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe (Plate 11) shows. Nor has all this faux marble paint in Saint-Savin been restored: some medieval paint remains, as Plate 7 shows, still capturing a swirling pattern similar enough to an actual marble, like that in Hagia Sophia (Plate 6). Saint-Savin was painted to resemble the marbles of famous churches like Hagia Sophia or those of Rome—but not, I think, simply to 'trick the eye' into believing they were real stones. After all, only a few of those who worshipped in the abbey church on the Gartempe would ever have seen real marble, certainly not of the decorative quality so praised in traditional ekphrases, and on display in Rome or Constantinople. The goal of this sort of *trompe l'œil* is instead to persuade us to believe with confidence in the architectural suitability of this place, confirmed by the use of expected, conventional tropes (in this case architectural rather than verbal) which mark this building as indeed God's own house.

<sup>42</sup> This bright white ('candidus') marble, though the authentic variety comes from Greece, is described by Isidore (*Etym.* 15.5.8) as 'candoris eximii' ('of exceptional whiteness'); a very white marble (and many 'marbles' used in northern buildings were not authentic marbles at all) came to be called Parian. It also derived associations of heroic value from *Aeneid*, 1.581, where Aeneas, appearing glorious before Dido after stepping out from a concealing cloud, is likened to Parian stone set in gold.

<sup>43</sup> The phrase is used in the *Metrical Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, 946–7, where the 'insensible' material stones making up the cathedral 'enclose mysteries of living stones' ('Sic insensibiles lapides mysteria claudunt / Vivorum lapidum'). The trope of church members as 'living stones' derives from 1 Peter 2:4–5.

Sometime around 1235 in England, a very different poet from Paul the Silentiary (and writing in Latin heroic metres, not those of Greek) composed an ekphrasis of a great church, built by Bishop Hugh of Lincoln, canonized in that year. The poet may have been an itinerant cleric, Henri d'Avranches, who made a living writing poems for various patrons and various occasions. His ekphrasis of the new cathedral is part of his metrical life of St Hugh. Hugh's excellence as a pastor—'o gregis egregius' is Henri's epithet for him (846)—showed especially in his rebuilding, on a much grander scale than the previous building, the cathedral at Lincoln. The poem describes how new vaults soared upwards so they seemed to converse with the birds, how the walls were joined of white stone mortared in place. 'But', Henri comments, 'though the wall is constructed from the assemblage [of particular stones], as though disdaining this, it appears uniformly to connect the adjoining parts; this seems not by art but by nature, not to be a thing [that has been] united but to be a unity.'<sup>44</sup> This is, I think, a most curious comment, though in keeping with the medieval delight in illusionistic *trompe l'œil* that we have often noted. It can readily be moralized as the Church, unified from its diverse members, but the poem does not say that here. It is rather the conundrum presented by the art that is emphasized—how rough stones hewn of varying sizes can give such a regular, uniform impression.

In a number of French and English medieval churches, where the original plaster over the masonry can still be seen, thin lines, usually red, are painted on the plaster that outline regular, uniform, courses of stone. These do not follow the courses of the actual stones—in fact one can often readily see the discrepancy between the actual stonework and these illusionistic courses (notice especially the vaults and arches of the 12th-century nave of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe, shown in Plate 11). They have presented architecture historians (and anyone looking at them) with a puzzle. Perhaps these lines from Hugh's ekphrasis will shed some light on the wonderful mystery they intend, to make the wall's surface appear utterly regular, though clearly it actually is made up from an assembly of irregular, diverse parts.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> 'Et paries ex congerie constructus eorum, / Hoc quasi dedignans, mentitur continuare / Continguas partes; non esse videtur ab arte, / Quin a natura; non res unita, sed una' (*Metrical Life*, 868–71).

<sup>45</sup> Recht (1999: 204, 228–32, and figures 42 and 51) comments on the use of such painted simulations of stonework on the interior walls of Chartres and a number of other French churches. He argues convincingly that such polychrome elements were chosen to enhance particular values, such as a visual impression of height, and the effects of certain favoured colours. He also remarks that very often these simulated elements do not accord with the actual masonry.

According to Hugh's poem, the interior of Lincoln was a trove of such pleasures. The piers have contrasting shafts of black Purbeck stone. This feature is much emphasized—the skill it takes to hew and polish, how it flashes (*fulgens*, 'like lightning') in the light, how the cut shafts have been placed about the piers as though dancing in a ring (*quamdam celebrare choream*, 883). On their polished surfaces nature has painted various figures, such that even if art should labour a long time to produce the same, it scarcely could imitate nature (886–8). But we have just been told (875–8) how skilful art *has* laboured for a long time to produce, by cutting, polishing, and mounting, exactly these effects from the material stones. I don't think that Henri has just contradicted himself: rather, the poem strives for (and calls attention to) a kind of delightful illusion through its own method of description.

This is not the only riddle which the shafts provide. We cannot be sure what they are. 'Looked at closely this stone [Purbeck] can suspend our minds, doubtful [*ambiguas*] whether it be jasper or marble; but if jasper, dull jasper; if marble, a noble marble.'<sup>46</sup> Purbeck was used extensively in the new cathedral at Lincoln, a unique and much admired feature. Jasper is a gemstone, not found in such large units—except in the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18). The Purbeck stone is ambiguous, it confuses and puzzles us as we look at it—'what is it?'—and as we wonder, we begin to remember and think, for philosophizing (in the common maxim) began with wondering about the natures and causes of things. The stained glass in the windows also presents beholders with riddles: 'a double procession of windows holds out enigmas before the eyes' (897). These are in the stories and shapes of their stained glass, not retold by the poem in detail. Their various colours imitate the rainbow, or rather surpass it (*praecellentia*, 907). The interior is not about art imitating nature, but about how human art surpasses nature, and how the puzzles and enigmas artefacts create cause us in the best sense to stop, stare, puzzle, and think, possibly for our greater benefit. Hugh judges the completed interior as 'decor aptus et utilis' (895). These are stylistic values; he could as well be approving a successfully persuasive speech. And, just as artefacts should do, it persuades him to meditate, moralizing the parts of the cathedral, in a standard pastoral manner, as parts of the Church. The important point for my argument, though, is that the artefacts, including Hugh's poem, are first of all colourful wonders to admire and savour—but as we have seen, the nature of 'sapience' is 'sweet'.

Imaginary buildings, unsurprisingly, share this aesthetic. This description of a typical church building is from the best-known treatise on manual

<sup>46</sup> 'Inspectus lapis iste potest suspendere mentes, / Ambiguas utrum jaspis marmorve sit; at si / Jaspis, hebes jaspis; si marmor, nobile marmor' (*Metrical Life*, 879–80).

crafts from the Middle Ages, *De diversis artibus* of 'Theophilus', written around 1120. He has been identified as a north German Benedictine monk—therefore learned, as his prose indicates—and a master metalworker, identified with a number of fine objects made for churches and liturgical services. His work is in the form of advice to a novice, who is also both a monk and a craftsman; he gives him both moral and practical counsel:

Animated, dearest son, by these supporting virtues [of wise judgement], you have approached the House of God with confidence, and have adorned it with so much beauty; you have embellished the ceilings or walls with varied work in different colours and have, in some measure, shown to beholders the paradise of God, glowing with various flowers, verdant with herbs and foliage . . . For the human eye is not able to consider on what work first to fix its gaze: if it beholds the ceilings they glow like brocades; if it considers the walls they are a kind of paradise; if it regards the profusion of light from the windows, it marvels at the inestimable beauty of the glass and the infinitely rich and various workmanship. But if, perchance, the faithful soul observes the representation of the Lord's Passion expressed in art [*effigiem liniamentis expressam conspicatur*] it is stung with compassion [*compungitur*].<sup>47</sup>

Notice that the beauty of this building is all in its surfaces—ceilings, walls, windows—and its colours, gold, and many others; the human eye is not able to consider on what work first to fix its gaze. Notice how the audience is fully drawn into the work, beginning from a sense of overwhelming, magnificent amplitude but then finding its way through the multiple invitations which the ornaments make. The viewer is as much a maker of the experience as the original artisan. She must look and look, and look again. The beauty of these surfaces resides wholly in their effect on the viewer. The last sentence underscores this by emphasizing that the Passion is a painted effigy (*effigiem liniamentis expressam*) which draws out and effectively persuades the viewer to real compunction.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 'His virtutum stipulationibus' animatus, carissime fili, domum Dei, fiducialiter aggressus, tanto lepore decorasti, et laquearia seu parietes diverso opere, diversisque coloribus distinguens, paradisi Dei speciem floribus variis vernantem, gramine foliisque virentem, et sanctorum animas diversi meriti coronis foveantem, quodammodo aspicientibus ostendisti, quodque creatorem Deum in creatura laudant, et mirabilem in operibus suis praedicant, effecisti. Nec enim perpendere valet humanus oculus, cui operi primum aciem infigat; si respicit laquearia, vernant quasi pallia; si consideret parietes, est paradisi species; si luminis abundantiam ex fenestris intuetur, inaeestimabilem vitri decorem et operis pretiosissimi varietatem miratur. Quod si forte dominicae passionis effigiem liniamentis expressam conspicatur fidelis anima, compungitur' (Theophilus, *De diversis artibus*, 3, preface).

<sup>48</sup> Scarry 1999 remarks: 'It is hard—no matter how dedicated one is to the principle of "historical difference"—to account for the discrepancy between the aura of radical vulnerability beholders [of beautiful things] were assigned in the past and the aura of complete

## MASTER GREGORY AND THE STATUE OF VENUS

One of the more endearing and revealing medieval accounts of an encounter with a human-made statue—an ancient pagan nude at that—occurs in a description of the marvels he had seen in Rome by ‘Magister Gregorius’, an educated Englishman travelling abroad, probably in the first part of the 13th century. Unlike some other medieval observers of the scene, Master Gregory had a keen interest in Rome’s classical survivals, and indeed Pope Gregory the Great, who tore down a number of ancient public monuments, becomes something of a villain in his account. Master Gregory describes a number of statues and reliefs. His interest in them is primarily for the narratives they call to mind; their monumental size impresses him, but we get little more of his aesthetic responses. Mostly, in an epic mode, he tells the stories they signify. There is, however, one exception, a white marble statue of Venus ‘displaying herself naked’ to Paris during her ‘rash’ (*temerarius*) competition with Juno and Pallas of which he was the judge. Having briefly recounted the ancient story, Master Gregory describes his own responses to this statue’s ‘appearance of exceptional beauty’ (*eximie pulcritudinis species*). It is made of ‘Parian marble’, the fine bright-white stone described by Isidore and extolled by Virgil, as we have seen,<sup>49</sup> ‘with such wonderful and intricate skill, that she seems more like a living creature than a statue: indeed she seems to blush in her nakedness, a reddish tinge colouring her face, and it appears to those who take a close look that blood flows through her snowy [lips]’.<sup>50</sup> There is no trace of red colouring in the actual statue known now as the Capitoline Venus. But for Master Gregory, to be ‘exceptionally beautiful’ requires a red blush in her face, blood (as we know) being essential to *venustas* and *pulcritudo*. She is made with such skill that she appears living, blood seemingly flows (*natare*) even through her snowy lips. I do not think it is Gregory’s morals

immunity they are assigned today.’ Though this is not her word, I would argue that it is because the artwork has been deprived of its own intention.

<sup>49</sup> The surviving statue called the Capitoline Venus, which historians have argued is the subject of Master Gregory’s ekphrasis here, is actually of Parian marble, and it may be that Gregory’s Roman sources knew this. But any fine white marble could be called Parian. What was important to Master Gregory was the material’s magnificent and heroic associations, not its actual provenance. Thanks to Julian Gardner for raising this question.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Hec autem imago ex Pario marmore tam miro et inexplicabili perfecta est artificio, ut magis viva creatura videatur quam statua: erubescenti etenim nuditatem suam similis, faciem purpureo colore perfusam gerit. Videturque comminus aspicientibus in niveo ore ymaginis sanguinem natare’ (Magister Gregorius, *Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Rome*, 12.286–91), trans. Osborne. I have changed Osborne’s ‘complexion’ to a more literal equivalent of Latin *os, oris*.

that required the statue of Venus to blush in shame at her own nakedness, but rather his aesthetic sensibility that required a marble statue to have some blood in her in order to seem alive and truly beautiful (*eximie pulcritudinis species*). He focuses our attention on her mouth and lips (*in niveo ore*), 'snowy' in the actual marble, but seeming to flow with blood. That is the detail that marks the statue's beauty as exceptional.

So delighted was Master Gregory by its beauty that he revisited this statue three times, even though it was far from his inn.<sup>51</sup> The response he describes is in keeping with familiar medieval *trompe l'œil* aesthetic. He is intrigued by the statue's fine artifice, how it was made to seem so like a living creature. It is marvellous, he says, and because of its wonderful appearance and 'perhaps some magic spell that I'm unaware of' (*quam magicam persuasionem*) he went back three times to examine it. I have quoted Osborne's translation of this Latin phrase in order to show that the Latin means something rather different. Gregory's Latin (given in the footnote, and in parentheses earlier) emphasizes the artefact's persuasive-ness as art, not some 'magic spell'. He does not understand exactly how this art is accomplished, but he knows it is the effect of a human artificer, not an unknown agent. He wants to discover how the effect works, to know what unknown persuasive means the learned *magis* of this artefact employed. He is not afraid of the statue's mystery, nor drawn by repressed sexual desire to return against his will.<sup>52</sup> He well knows that the Venus is marble, and that her nakedness is beautiful. Her lifelike effect is from art, not magic. It is the delightful sensory and intellectual puzzle of the statue's exceptional refinement, its wondrous and inexplicably perfect artifice (12.286–7) that draws him to look and look again, and yet again.<sup>53</sup>

Gregory's fascination with the statue brings me finally back to the problem of beauty. I once heard a young mathematician talk about the 'beauty' of various mathematical phenomena. When asked what he meant

<sup>51</sup> 'Hanc autem propter mirandum speciem et nescio quam magicam persuasionem ter coactus sum revisere, cum ab hospicio meo duobus stadiis distaret' (*Narracio de mirabilibus urbis Rome*, 12.291–3).

<sup>52</sup> Given how Master Gregory laughs delightedly (in cap. 7) at the enormous genitals of the bronze Spinario statue, he was no repressed prude.

<sup>53</sup> A somewhat similar encounter with ancient Roman statues by a medieval cleric is described by Hildebert of Lavardin in his poem (c.1100) on Roman antiquities (carmen 36). Like Master Gregory, Hildebert is especially admiring of and curious about the artisanry of these statues. Hildebert's poem also has been understood in quite different ways, depending to some extent on how his Latin is interpreted. Otter 2010 argues (against Jaeger 1997 among others) that Hildebert responds to the statues of the gods as particularly intriguing expressions of rhetorical intention, through the related concepts of *vultus*, the 'face' cultivated in persuasive delivery, and *persona* or 'mask'.

by beauty, he thought a bit and then said ‘symmetry’, adding, with emphasis, that beauty is not dependent on human beings: it is ‘out there in nature’, like prime numbers—and everyone around nodded their heads, including me. This moment confirmed to me that indeed beauty is not an aesthetic concept, certainly not in the ways that I have been developing in this book. Because what I have focused on as aesthetic values have everything to do with human beings, indeed human senses are what medieval aesthetics is all about. But that mathematician’s understanding of Beauty is also an ancient one, familiar to all the late ancient Christians, and indeed it has dominated the theology of Beauty all along.<sup>54</sup> Edgar De Bruyne’s formative studies, *Études de l’esthétique médiévale*, constructed a narrative of the general triumph during the medieval centuries of a neoplatonic idea of Beauty—which is where this mathematical notion of Beauty comes from—starting from Augustine’s philosophical works but especially from Boethius, to Scotus Eriugena’s translation/commentary of pseudo-Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchies* in the 9th century, to the early 12th century with Hugh of St Victor (especially *De sacramentis*) and the later Victorines, Bernard of Clairvaux, and then on to Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure, where De Bruyne ended. He demonstrates how from the early 13th century, beginning with William of Auvergne and Alexander of Hales, theologians centred in Paris recognized that *bonus* and *pulcher* were not ready equivalents, and that consequently a philosophical distinction needed to be made between a (theological) idea of Beauty and the ‘ordinary beauty’ of worldly creatures. Alexander of Hales resolved this hierarchically, in good neoplatonist fashion, and later writers followed his model, paying very little attention to human beings’ experiences of their own artefacts.<sup>55</sup> Many have subsequently taken this story further, down to current aesthetic philosophy. And I did just say ‘aesthetic philosophy’, despite the fact that I previously

<sup>54</sup> The English word *aesthetics* was applied to theories of art first in the late 18th century, and then much developed in the 19th through translations from the German of various transcendental philosophers, including Kant and particularly Hegel. As an English word it had meant ‘of or pertaining to the senses and sensory experience’, equivalent to Latin *sensus* and its derivatives. When English *aesthetic* began to be used exclusively in the transcendentalist manner, there were vigorous complaints from various British philosophers about the loss through misuse of a valuable word, but by the time of Ruskin, the usurpation of its original meaning was complete. One can trace this fascinating turn in the history of the idea via the *OED*, s.v. *aesthetic*.

<sup>55</sup> De Bruyne (1998 [1946], vol. 2) traces this story, with many cogent quotations, from William of Auvergne through Bonaventure; on Alexander of Hales, see pp. 88–120. De Bruyne especially emphasized an ‘aesthetics of light’, derived from new ideas in the universities about light physics and optics. What I have characterized as an over-theologizing and over-moralizing of medieval artworks and aesthetic experiences stems largely from this discussion.

observed that Beauty in neoplatonism is not an *aesthetic* concept. In short, a muddle built up during the Middle Ages concerning the nature of beauty. Scholastic theology only partly resolved this—and in some ways exacerbated it—by giving so little attention to human artistic experience itself (at the neglected bottom of the hierarchy), treating it either as an aspect only of ethics and morals to be dealt with pastorally, or as a more or less false analogue to God's creation. The muddle was fostered in part at least by the schoolmen's continued use of the word *pulchritudo*.

Eriugena defines *pulchritudo*: 'haec vero multiplicatio et variatio universorum est pulchritudo', the divine simplex multiplies itself in the variety of created forms and this is Beauty. Or rather 'haec vero . . . est *pulchritudo*', for that is the Latin word that the theologians all used. But medieval theological *pulchritudo* has very little to do with art created by and for human beings. Indeed *pulchritudo* gets redefined in this tradition as beauty without any skin or blood at all. But that is the world of metaphysical theologians, and there is plenty of other evidence, particularly in the traditions of liturgical prayer, that western Christianity could never in practice leave this human world behind, and never became wholly an-aesthetic.

The neoplatonists triumphed in theology and in the schools, as De Bruyne and many others have shown (though to a lesser degree perhaps than Umberto Eco insisted). By the 13th century, the Parisian master Alexander of Hales wrote as a scholastic commonplace that beauty is an attribute which Divinity passes on in the act of creation to all natural creatures, and it is characterized by symmetry and congruence. Moreover, he is quoting Augustine when he does so: 'all beauty is the congruency of parts with a particular agreeableness [*suavitas*] of colour' (Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, Q.64, citing *De civ. Dei* 12.19). In this formulation, human art, as for Plato, is always but a poor copy of natural creation and a very dim reflection of the divine Idea. Implicit also is the assumption that human art is best when it is most realistically reproducing natural forms. Yet even this most scholastic of definitions preserves something of *pulchritudo*'s ancient link with colours and appearances that arouse pleasure in their beholders and hearers—for pleasure, *suavitas*, is not an objective quality or state, but a sensation in a human body. This is underscored by Aquinas in the observation quoted earlier in this chapter, that only upon being seen by someone (*visa*) are things said to be *pulchra*. He makes a related observation, that those things having a bright colour are called *pulchra*.<sup>56</sup> In each case in the *Summa theologica*, he is speaking not of human-made beauty but of the Trinity, indeed of the Son,

<sup>56</sup> 'Nam ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem, integritas sive perfectio: quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt. Et debita proportio sive consonantia. Et

Wisdom, the *Logos*. The Son is called *logos* because, Aquinas says, like a human craftsman setting out to make something, God has a formulated plan which His creation realizes. This is an entirely neoplatonist thought. Aquinas cites the Greek father, John Damascene, that the divine Logos is *splendor intellectus*, a Beauty entirely of and for the intellect. And yet . . . Aquinas also uses that troublesome worldly adjective, *pulcher*, just as Augustine had done in his great poem to the Beauty of God with which I began this chapter. *Pulcher*, Aquinas reminds us in these discussions of the trinitarian nature of God, is not just a *splendor* of the intellect, but of the human eye and the bright colours of what it sees and experiences. As Peter Brown, one of the most astute historians of the late antique world, has commented, '[a]sceticism, for Augustine, did not mean simple flight from the material world . . . Instead of disembodied souls, Augustine had to think about souls intimately linked (for good or ill) to bodies' (P. Brown 2012: 32).<sup>57</sup> This can equally be said of Aquinas. And though Aquinas was more rationalist than Augustine, his rationalism led him to God through the sensory world. Continuing to use words like *pulcher* and *dulcis*, even of God's own nature, maintains that connectedness.

Another etymology may help strengthen this point, from Thomas of Cîteaux, abbot at the turn of the 13th century. Commenting on the Song of Songs 7:6: 'How beautiful [*pulchra*] art thou, and how comely [*decora*], my dearest [*charissima*]', he writes:

the soul is called in this place *pulchra*, *decora*, *charissima*. 'Pulcher' is from 'pollens cernenti', powerful [in its effect] on the beholder. This is said of the exterior man; 'decorus' is from 'decus cordis', the ornament of the heart, of the interior man. Thus the soul is beautiful without in its seemliness of behaviour, ornamented within by its purity of heart, dearest above for the sweetness of its charms.<sup>58</sup>

This etymology is of course wrong linguistically, but it points to an enduring medieval assumption worth pondering: that something of beauty is truly 'in the eye'—and the ear, the mouth, the skin, the

iterum claritas; unde quae habent colorem nitidum pulchra esse dicuntur' (*STI*, Q.39, a.8, resp.). The citation of Damascene is in this same section, on the nature of the Trinity.

<sup>57</sup> That Christian versions of hylomorphism are found in medieval writers of an Augustinian as well as Aristotelian tradition is also a major theme of Bynum 2011 and 2001.

<sup>58</sup> 'Secundum hoc anima dicitur in hoc loco *pulchra*, *decora*, *charissima*. [on Cant. 7:6, 'Quam pulchra es et quam decora, charissima, in deliciis'] Pulcher dicitur pollens cernenti. Hoc secundum exteriorem hominem; decorus dicitur decus cordis, hoc secundum interioem. Est igitur anima exterius pulchra morum maturitate, decora interius cordis puritate, charissima superius deliciarum suavitate' (Thomas of Cîteaux, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 11; *PL* 206.725).

nose—‘of the beholder’, and that all the medieval arts invite us to ‘taste and see’ a variety of pulchritudinous appearances for our delight, not solely for our moral or theological instruction. For ‘delight’, *suavitas* and *pulchritudo*, are both names for God in this world, however uneasy their alliance with theology may be.

## CODA: BONAVENTURE ON HUMAN ART

Bonaventure’s brief treatise on the arts curriculum, *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, is of considerable interest because it is one of the very few theoretical treatments of human art considered substantially on its own terms. Judged genuine by the Quaracchi editors of 1964, it appears to be a university sermon, and moreover (the editors declare) not the *reportatio* of a lecture, but a composition edited and approved by Bonaventure himself.

Bonaventure often figures largely (and rightly) in histories of medieval aesthetic thought. De Bruyne gave his work considerable space and the quotations he collected from his work still form the basis of most of the subsequent discussion of a neoplatonist theory of Beauty from the later Middle Ages. The problem with many of those quotations, however, is that they are culled from works in which Bonaventure’s remarks about aesthetic beauty are incidental to discussions devoted to quite different speculative and non-human subjects, such as the Trinity, angelic intelligence, the condition of souls in Hell, and so on. Wrested from their contexts, Bonaventure’s sayings can attain a gnomic status, floating free of their original scope and purpose—and therefore be applied to very different, and indeed incompatible, matters. The advantage of examining his remarks in *De reductione artium* is both their relative length and the fact that his subject is actually human artifice and its products.

The title given to this work in the Quaracchi edition is found in a number of its manuscripts, though it is also called ‘Sermo de luminibus’ and ‘Sermo de ortu (or de divisione) scientiarum’. In some manuscripts it follows Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, perhaps an indication of how seriously it was considered among his mature work. The editors date it to Bonaventure’s Paris years, as indeed both the content and style of the treatise would suggest, between 1253 and 1257. These were the years in Paris of high Aristotelian enthusiasm, of Albertus Magnus and plentiful translations of the Arabic commentaries as well as the full corpus of Aristotle’s work. That helps to set the intellectual context of this treatise. For it is about a return (*reductio*) of the arts curriculum to the fold of theology, not because the arts had strayed but because theology, he thought, was in danger of becoming exclusively a curriculum of reductive

logical analysis, forgetting its chief purpose of understanding sacred Scripture. Bonaventure's named authorities (sect. 5) are Augustine, Gregory, and pseudo-Dionysius, and those he names as their modern successors: Anselm in reasoning, Bernard in preaching, Richard (of St Victor) in contemplation, and Hugh of St Victor especially: 'Hugo vero omnia haec', Hugh did it all. Aristotle is never mentioned (in Paris in the mid 13th century!), though it should be noted that Bonaventure's analysis of the processes of human sensory perception is fully Aristotelian.

The sermon's text is James 1:17: 'every good and perfect gift is from above, descending from the Father of lights.' It is fine example of a medieval thematic sermon, its structuring principle that of a scholastic *distinctio*, defining by breaking its terms down into components of two and three, a technique he imitates from Hugh of St Victor, who used it especially in Bonaventure's acknowledged source for this work, *Didascalicon*. Along with much else, *Didascalicon* contains a treatment of the human arts, starting with the numerical ones (the quadrivium) and the practical ones, involving craft practices and materials, which Hugh called 'mechanical art'. However, the greatest attention is paid to the arts of language, the trivium, the traditional core and basis of later education. The focus of the whole exposition, for Bonaventure as it was for Hugh, is illumination of the sacred text rather than a general theory of knowledge. It is important to keep this aim in mind when studying the work.

There are, says Bonaventure, many kinds of lights emanating from the source of all light. In good neoplatonist fashion, these are arranged in a set of steps from lowest to highest and most encompassing. The first 'light', the lowest, is that of 'ars mechanica'. Bonaventure follows the nomenclature of *Didascalicon* in listing its disciplines: working with cloth and all supple materials, working with metals and all hard materials (including stone and wood), agriculture (including all kinds of farming), hunting (including cooking and brewing), navigation (defined not only as transport but also as commerce, 'everything to do with buying and selling', *omnis mercatio*), medicine (including surgery), and 'ars theatra'.<sup>59</sup> These practical arts all work with physical materials to make delightful and socially useful products known experientially through human senses. One must also consider their purposes:

For every mechanical art is either for comfort or convenience; or it is for putting away sadness or want; or either it profits or pleases, as this [saying] of

<sup>59</sup> In *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St Victor placed *theatrica* with *medicina* among the practical arts for both were concerned with promoting health. As Hugh says, the ancients valued theatrical arts because 'by temperate motion natural heat is stimulated in the body and by enjoyment the mind is refreshed' (*Didascalicon*, 2.27.7). See Olson 1982.

Horace: 'Artists [*poetae*] desire either to profit or to please' [*Ars Poetica* 333]. And again: 'He wins the entire vote who mixes the sweet with the useful' [*Ars Poetica* 343].<sup>60</sup>

The two citations from Horace's *Ars Poetica* are significant (and important as well is the fact that they were Parisian commonplaces at the time Bonaventure wrote). At no point does Bonaventure justify the process or product or goal of human artifice in terms of its offering specific moral lessons or models for moral behaviour. Human-made objects do not preach; and they do not in themselves contain definite lessons. Instead, Bonaventure cites the Ciceronian and Horatian values, *utilis* and *dulcis*, *prodesse* and *delectare*. As we have seen, these were widely shared throughout the medieval centuries, not only from the 12th century onwards. Preaching, Bonaventure says, is for people who have 'lumen cognitionis philosophicae' and 'lumen gratiae et sacrae Scripturae', the illumination of philosophical knowledge and the illumination of grace and the Bible. For Bonaventure, the knowledge provided in the mechanical arts is a different sort of illumination, but it is genuine illumination, 'lumen artis mechanicae'. These arts do not borrow or imitate their particular knowledge from moral philosophy or from theological doctrine. They have their own. Like Augustine, Bonaventure is not the strongest of neoplatonists. For him, human minds fully inhabit human sensory bodies, and even the most spiritual of human intellectual activities still require five senses, albeit 'spiritual' ones.

Of the seven mechanical arts he defines (and, as he acknowledges, he has stretched Hugh's initial definitions), Bonaventure most enlarges the definition of 'theatrical art'. For Hugh, 'theatre' is mostly what we also would recognize as theatre: events involving actors and dancers, taking place in ancient theatres (which he would have known about from both textual and archaeological sources). But his concept is broader, taking in all that is performed, including speaking. Bonaventure describes the category thus: 'If something is for comfort and delight, then it is *theatrica*, which is an art of games [*ars ludorum*], encompassing every manner of playing, whether it may be in singing [*cantibus*], or in musical instruments [*organis*], or in fashioned images [*figmentis*], or in gestures of the body.'<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> 'Quoniam omnis ars mechanica aut est ad solatium, aut ad commodum; sive aut est ad excludendam tristitiam, aut indigentiam; sive aut prodest, aut delectat, secundum illud Horatii: "Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetae." Et iterum: "Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci"' (*De reductione artium*, 2).

<sup>61</sup> 'Si est ad solatium et delectationem, sic est theatrica, quae est ars ludorum, omnem modum ludendi continens, sive sit in cantibus, sive in organis, sive in figmentis, sive in gesticulationibus corporis' (*De reductione artium*, 2).

So for Bonaventure, the art of playing encompasses every kind of song and music (though, at this time, excluding sacred chant)—and *cantus* should be understood to include non-liturgical poems, Latin and vernacular, as well as ‘songs’ in our sense (Bent 2004)—all fashioning of material images, and all kinds of ‘gesticulations of the body’, including games and sports, dancing, and activities approaching something like what we consider acting. Perhaps he also is thinking of reading aloud, the sort of social reading of *facta et dicta humanorum*—the deeds and sayings of human histories contained in romances and chronicles—that Aquinas too considers as innocent pleasure (as we saw in Chapter 2).

Bonaventure discusses the illumination of mechanical arts in terms of aesthetic knowledge, ‘lumen cognitionis sensitivae’ (*De reductione artium*, sects. 9–10). The two kinds of illumination—of the senses and of the mechanical arts—are closely allied. Both involve external objects, both operate within material bodies, both are wholly sensual. The products of mechanical arts are for sensory pleasure. No puritan, Bonaventure says that sensory ‘light’ is motivated by desire for its objects and joy in experiencing them. ‘In this way, the senses of our heart must seek out with desire something lovely or harmonious or sweet-smelling or sweet or soft, find (it) with joy, without ceasing seek it again.’<sup>62</sup> Then he glosses his own comment, seeing the actions of bodily senses as exactly parallel to the so-called spiritual senses with which he was to be so concerned in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*: ‘Observe in what way divine wisdom is contained in a hidden way in sensory knowing, and how marvelous it is [that] contemplation according to the five spiritual senses is conformed to the bodily senses.’<sup>63</sup>

These observations set up Bonaventure’s remarkable justification for the intellectual value of the procedures, aims, and products of mechanical art. For in making human artefacts, we can understand something true about the generation and Incarnation of Christ, and the living form and union of God and the soul. The process of human artistic creation, in Bonaventure’s analysis, is spiritual generation of a kind, and its realization also a kind of incarnation.

If we may consider the (artistic) process [*egressum*], we will understand. For an artefact comes from the artist by means of a mediating likeness existing in

<sup>62</sup> ‘Per hunc etiam modum sensus cordis nostri sive pulcrum, sive consonum, sive odoriferum, sive dulce, sive mulcebre debet desideranter quaerere, gaudenter invenire incessanter repetere’ (*De reductione artium*, 10).

<sup>63</sup> ‘Ecce, quomodo in cognitione sensitiva continetur occulte divina sapientia, et quam mira est contemplatio quinque sensuum spiritualium secundum conformitatem ad sensus corporales’ (*De reductione artium*, 10).

his mind; by means of which the artist plans [his work] out [*excogitat*] before he produces, then he produces as he has planned [*disposuit*]. But the artist produces an actual work assumed to his mental exemplar so far as he is best able . . . By this means understand that no creature proceeds from the highest Maker except through the eternal Plan, 'by whom all things are made' [*in quo omnia disposuit*], and through which he has produced not only creatures having an idea of his traces [*rationem vestigii*], but also of his image [*sed etiam imaginis*], that this same may be adapted [*assimilari*] through understanding and love. And since through sin the rational creature had clouded his eye of contemplation, it was most courteous [*decentissimum*] that the eternal and invisible be made visible and assume flesh, that he might lead us home [*nos reduceret*; note the echo of this treatise's title] to our Father . . . And it is said as well 'The Word was made flesh' [John 1:14].—Therefore considering the light of mechanical art with respect to the production of a work, we will witness there the incarnation and generation of the Word, that is divinity and humanity and the health of all the faithful [*totius fidei integritatem*].<sup>64</sup>

The process of human artistic making is one of incarnation, as a mental design is given material form. For a theologian like Bonaventure, this would seem a remarkable statement to make about arts which he has previously also characterized (in more typical neoplatonist fashion) as the servile and degenerate offspring of philosophical ideas.<sup>65</sup> He emphasizes, as does Aquinas (on those rare occasions when he discusses human art) the *making*, the sheer artistry involved in crafting a work that surpasses its materials.<sup>66</sup> In a certain way, the Incarnation itself could be seen as a feat of *trompe l'œil* artistry, a most fruitful paradox and continuing 'hermeneutical irritant', as dozens of later church councils proved.<sup>67</sup> As Bonaventure discusses it, the joy he describes is not in some meaning he finds in the object, but rather the pleasures of the craftsman in making it and our sensory pleasures in perceiving it. Artists do not imitate the doctrine of

<sup>64</sup> 'Si consideremus egressum, videbimus. Quod effectus artificialis exit ab artifice, mediante similitudine existente in mente; per quam artifex excogitat antequam producat, inde producit, sicut disposuit. Producit autem artifex exterius opus assumilatum exemplari interiori eatenus, qua potest melius . . . Per hunc modum intellige, quod a summo Opifice nulla creatura processit nisi per Verbum aeternum, "in quo omnia disposuit", et per quod produxit non solum creaturas habentes rationem vestigii, sed etiam imaginis, ut eidem assimilari possint per cognitionem et amorem. Et quoniam per peccatum rationalis creatura oculum contemplationis obnubilatum habuit; decentissimum fuit, ut aeternum et invisibile fieret visibile et assumeret carnem, ut nos ad Patrem reduceret . . . Et ideo dicitur "Verbum caro factum".—Considerantes igitur illuminationem artis mechanicae quantum ad operis egressum, intuebimur ibi Verbum generatum et incarnatum, id est Divinitatem et humanitatem et totius fidei integritatem' (*De reductione artium*, 12).

<sup>65</sup> '[S]ervilis est et degenerat a cognitione philosophiae' (*De reductione artium*, 2).

<sup>66</sup> A point made by Hanning 1984.

<sup>67</sup> The phrase is that of Catherine Brown 1998, an irritant like that eventually producing a pearl.

Incarnation by expressing it directly but in the ways their art assumes and demonstrates some of its process.

Notable as well in Bonaventure's characterization of human art is his use of a familiar, elementary discourse of rhetoric. That the artist must first shape his work in his mind before he gives it any material form, fashioning it mentally before doing so materially, is also emphasized by Geoffrey of Vinsauf in his *Poetra nova*, which, in Bonaventure's time, was widely taught as a basic rhetoric manual (Woods 2010). The advice was hardly unique to Geoffrey, but Bonaventure's recollection here of the beginning of a standard work in the arts course (as was Horace's *Ars Poetica*) is surely deliberate and would need no elaborate glossing. Then too, Bonaventure uses the verb *disposuit* in his paraphrase of the familiar phrase from the Nicene Creed 'per quem omnia facta sunt'; the standard term in rhetoric for 'fashion', as verb and noun, is *disponere* and *dispositio*. *Excogitatio* was a common medieval synonym for rhetorical *inventio*. Finally, that materials must be adapted to the understanding and characters of their audience is another basic tenet—Bonaventure adds a pleasing note by calling 'decentissimum' the divine gesture by which the eternal and invisible was made visible and assumed our flesh. *Decentus* is essentially a value of style, both of art and of social life.

In short, in this characterization of the 'degenerates' produced by the mechanical arts, Bonaventure uses the very terms of craft invention to characterize their value as thought incarnated in matter. 'Verbum caro factum est', he quotes towards the end of this passage, in justification of human artifice, its aims and products. Using that particular quote here makes a powerful, and unexpected, claim that profoundest dignity is to be awarded artisans and their makings in and of themselves. It brings to my mind Yeats's poem about the value of art, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', in which the creator of the timeless 'golden bird' and of 'the artifice of eternity' must at last 'lie down where all the ladders start / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'. But Yeats is embittered by his enforced descent, deserted among his heart's degenerate detritus 'now that my ladder's gone'. Bonaventure insists on the dignity of art-making, even on the bottom-most rung of the ladder. Yeats is the purer platonist.

Bonaventure's exaggerated contrasts of the sublime and degenerate in his remarks about art is in keeping with the astonishing stylistic paradoxes employed by Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and so many other verbal artisans. Antitheses expressed hyperbolically—in words, music, stone, metal, and paint—seem to be an essential characteristic of medieval taste, whether found in the doctrine of Incarnation or in the incarnations of artisans' designs. Air, fire, and light are wonderfully united by a human maker with the materials of stone and parchment, glass and fabric, metal

and earth. The process of incarnation involves an ascent, of course, from materials to finished creation—but equally a descent of a design into materials.<sup>68</sup> In his remarks on human artistry, Bonaventure emphasizes the value of the descent into material and sensation—a design idea made material in our world—which offers a true light, even though it is the very lowest of those emanating from the Father of Lights. Taken in context, the analogy is between Incarnation and art-making, the procedure of invention, ordering, and style. Its terms are from rhetoric not theology. He has made an accomplished ‘analysis of the arts’ with respect to theology, not simply a ‘reduction of the arts’ to theology.

Bonaventure’s conclusion about the value of mechanical arts emphasizes exactly this point. An artist makes a work for three possible reasons: for fame, for social benefit, or for pleasure:

Every artist who creates any work either creates that he may be praised for it, or that he may busy or profit himself or another, or that he may delight in it, according to the three qualities which are in the appetites, that is, an honest good, communally beneficial, and pleasurable . . . thus is there [in making a work] a particular marvellous unity and from that union a marvellous delight; for, according as is said in Proverbs, ‘my delights are with the children of men’. In this way the illumination of mechanical art is a way to the illumination of sacred Scripture.<sup>69</sup>

In this trio, we can recognize the familiar medieval aesthetic values of *honestus, utilis et dulcis*. God, says Bonaventure, made the rational human soul for three similar reasons, to praise Him, to serve Him, and to delight and rest in Him. And then he quotes Proverbs 8:31, *Sapientia* (the Son) as *artifex* of Creation saying, ‘my delights are with the children of men’. On just that model, by making a ‘wonderful union [of design and material] and from that union a wonderful pleasure’, Bonaventure concludes, even mechanical art offers a truthful way to illuminate Holy Scripture.

<sup>68</sup> While Bonaventure seems to articulate in these remarks what is sometimes called an ‘incarnation aesthetics’ (Leupin 2003), he never claims that the artefact—the product per se—imitates the theology of Incarnation. That is the view of modern, neoplatonizing interpretations of medieval art, many based very much in the texts collected in De Bruyne’s massive florilegium. These accounts always emphasize the ‘ascent’ and de-naturalizing of material product into pure idea, as did Yeats in his ‘Byzantium’ poems—a thoroughly Modernist aesthetic.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Omnis enim artifex, qui aliquod opus facit, aut facit ut per illud laudetur, aut ut per illud sibi aliquid operetur vel lucretur, aut ut in illo delectetur, secundum tria, quae sunt in appetibilibus, scilicet bonum honestum, conferens et delectabile . . . ita quod est ibi quaedam mirabilis unio et ex unione mirabilis delectatio; quoniam, secundum quod dicitur in Proverbiis [8:31], “deliciae meae esse cum fillis hominum”.—Ecce quomodo illuminatio artis mechanicae via est ad illuminationem sacrae Scripturae’ (*De reductione artium*, 14).

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## General Index

- abbreviation and expansion 172–5  
 Abelard, Peter 21n9  
 Adam of Dryburgh 95  
 Aelred of Rievaulx 69n37, 123–4  
 Alan of Lille 140–1  
 Albertus Magnus 52–3  
 Alcuin 101, 117–18, 149–50 with n37  
 Allen, Judson Boyce 10  
 Ambrose, St 130  
 amplification *see* abbreviation  
     and expansion  
 Annas, Julia 57n18  
*Annot and John* (13th-century English  
     lyric) 104–5  
 antithesis 23, 33, 55–61, 67–70, 90, 91,  
     103, 105, 158, 169–70, 172–3,  
 Aquinas, Thomas 9–10, 47, 70–9, 80,  
     112, 133–4, 187, 198; *commentary*  
     *on Nicomachean Ethics* 70–6; influence  
     of Augustine, *De trinitate*, Book  
     11 51; on Boethius, *Opuscula*  
     *sacra* 76–8  
 architecture 39–41, 113, 121, 136–7, 150,  
     151–2, 187–93, Pls 6–7, 10–11  
 Aristotle 9, 21, 22, 23, 27–8, 45–7,  
     57n18, 59n21, 83–4, 86, 102, 103, 109,  
     112, 168, 185, Pl. 3; Aquinas'  
     *commentary on the Nicomachean*  
     *ethics* 70–6  
 Auerbach, Erich 11, 153 with n41, 154  
 Augustine of Hippo, St 9, 15, 43, 50, 85,  
     94, 97–8, 102–3, 105, 124, 126, 156–9,  
     163–4, 166–7, 169, 170, 172;  
     *commentary on Ps 44* (diversity) 156–9;  
     *Confessions* 10.27 ('*Pulchritudo tam*  
     *antique et tam nova*') 166–7, 198; *De*  
     *trinitate*, book 11 50–2, 170–1; letter  
     91, to Nectarius (use of irony) 65–7;  
     on plain and obscure style 62–4; on  
     preaching 163–4, 168–9; on the  
     spiritual senses 126–7; on pleasure  
     (*licitus* and *illicitus*) 55–60, 79; theory  
     of human will 51–2, 119  
 Avicenna 185–6  
  
 Bacon, Francis (20th-century artist) 4  
 Bacon, Roger 109–12  
 Bakhtin, Mikhail 28  
 Barry, Dan 2  
  
 Basil of Caesarea 165–6  
 beauty *see pulc(h)er, pulchritudo* in Index  
     of Words  
 Bede, St 138n8, 149–50 with n37  
 Beebe, Kathryn 160n58  
 Beer, Jeanette 179n14  
 Bene of Florence 38, 85, 119, 172  
 Bennett, Jill 14n19  
 Bent, Margaret 161n61, 202  
*Beowulf* 36, 177  
 Bernard of Clairvaux 67–70, 90–2,  
     147–50, 161–2  
 Binski, Paul 29, 137n6, 150n38, 173n8,  
     184n28, 190  
 Boccaccio, Giovanni 64  
 Boethius 8, 18, 31n29, 188  
 Bonaventure, St 12n17, 95, 199–205  
 Boncompagno da Signa 26–7  
 Bond, Gerald 24, 112–13  
 Bower, Calvin 90n21  
 Brenk, Beat 151–2  
 Brown, Catherine 24nn13 and 15,  
     78n50, 203n67  
 Brown, Cynthia 178n12  
 Brown, Michelle 35n38  
 Brown, Peter 56n16, 198  
 Burde, Mark 28, 141n16  
 Burke, Edmund 108, 121–2, 125  
 Burnett, Charles 111n9, 129  
 Burnyeat, Myles 23n12, 42n47  
 Burton, Robert 146  
 Bynum, Caroline Walker 31n29, 32n30,  
     34n35, 49n7, 131nn50 and 51, 148,  
     161, 198n57  
  
 Camille, Michael 7n9, 25, 28  
 Canticles *see* Song of Songs  
 Caplan, Harry 87n14, 124n36  
 carnival *see* Bakhtin  
 Cartlidge, Neil 24n13, 28nn22 and 23  
 Cassiodorus 156, 159  
 Chastelain, George *see douze dames de*  
     *rhétorique, Les*  
 Châtillon, Jean 96, 98  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey 20n6, 150  
 chiasmus (grammatical) *see* antithesis  
 Cicero 9n12, 18, 25, 42, 58n19, 59n21,  
     60n24, 65, 79, 80, 82, 83, 86, 106n60,  
     133, 136, 139, 181, Pl. 1;

- on *honestus* 114–19, 122–3; on  
sweetness 102–3, 105, 108–9, 122–3  
*Cleanness* (English poem), 173–5; *see also*  
*Gawain and the Green Knight*  
Coolman, Boyd 126, 128  
curious(ity) 102n49, 141, 142, 149–50, 162  
Curtius, Ernst Robert 102n49, 142
- Dale, Thomas E. 147  
Dante 34, 48–50, 60, 92–3  
Davis, R.H.C. 150  
De Bolla, Peter 4  
De Bruyne, Edgar 8, 10, 13, 74n43,  
176n10, 196–7, 199  
debate 23–4, 28, 62, 65, 78n50, 180  
Demetrius (author of *On Style*) 86–7  
Demus, Otto 136n4, 159n56  
Derrida, Jacques 82n5  
desire 48–53  
Desmouliiez, André 80n1, 135n1  
Dihle, Albrecht 51n8, 59n20  
Disputation, as school exercise 23–4;  
Square of Oppositions 26–7  
diversity 153–64; *see also* mixture  
*\rhétorique, Les* 178–80, Pl. 9  
*Dream of the Rood, The* 35–9  
dreams 36, 37n40, 51–3  
Dronke, Peter 186n33
- Eco, Umberto 8, 197  
Eden, Kathy 15n56, 60n22, 84n9  
ekphrasis 187–95; Abbot Suger on  
St-Denis 39–41; Capitoline Venus  
194–5; in the Metrical Life of St Hugh  
191; *see also Cleanness, Dream of the*  
*Rood, Gawain and the Green Knight,*  
*Hagia Sophia; see also Latin descriptio*  
in Index of Words  
emotion and affect, relationship of  
*see* humours (bodily)  
Evagrius Ponticus 146  
expansion *see* abbreviation and expansion
- Fabri, Felix 159–60  
Fantham, Elaine 82, 86n13, 135nn1–2  
Feiss, Hugh 3  
Fortunatus, Venantius 92, 106–7  
Foxe, John 109  
Fromund (Benedictine monk) 130
- Gage, John 185n31, 186n33  
Galen 82, 105  
games 18, 20–1, 22, 27–8, 63–4, 77–8  
Ganz, David 15n21, 103  
Gardner, Julian 194n49  
*Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir* 175–8,  
181, 185, *see also Cleanness*  
gemstones 39–41, 173–5, 179, 192  
Geoffrey of Vinsauf 84, 87–8, 152  
Giuliani, Rudolf 1–2  
*Gloria, laus, et honor see* Theodulph, Bishop  
of Orléans  
Gómez Miedes, Bernardino 30–1 with  
n27, 142, 143, 155  
Gregory of Nyssa 31–4, 142–3  
Gregory the Great 64n28, 145 with n26,  
149–50, 184 with n29  
grotesques in art and architecture 146–50  
Guido d'Arezzo 160–1  
Guigo II 130–1, 132–3
- Hagia Sophia, descriptions of 136–7, 151,  
187, 189–90, Pl. 6  
Henri d'Avranches 191–2  
Hildebert of Lavardin 195n53  
honesty *see honor* in Index of Words  
Horace 142, 169, 201  
Howell, W.S. 117nn21–2  
Hugh of Fleury 99–101  
Hugh of Lincoln 191–2  
Hugh of St Victor 19, 88n15, 200–01  
Huizinga, Johan 18–19, 22–3, 25  
humour 27–35  
humours (bodily) 27–35, 81–9, 104–5,  
110–11  
Huot, Sylvia 29n25, 189
- I/incarnation 2–3, 4, 34n35, 134, 161–2,  
164, 202–5;  
and the arts 2, 48, 202–5  
intention(s) 48–53, 167–72; Augustine on  
50–2, 169, 170, 172; of the author  
167–8, 171; of the work 53–4  
Isidore of Seville 3n2, 82, 88, 94–5, 145,  
182–4, 186, 188, 190
- Jacobus Publicius 26–7, Pl. 4  
Jaeger, C. Stephen 24, 112–13  
Jerome, St 97–8  
John Cassian 33, 146–7  
justice, Augustine on 57–9
- Kahn, Charles H. 51n8  
Kay, Sarah 7  
Kimmelman, Michael 2  
kneeling (in prayer, relation to tears) 145
- Lanham, Richard A. 20n7, 82n5  
Lateran 151–2  
laughter *see* under physiology

- Lawn, Brian 111n9, 144n22  
 Leach, Elizabeth Eva 24n15, 161n61  
 Leclercq, Jean 77n48, 92, 129n44  
 liturgy 38, 106–7, 141 with n15, 169  
*ludus* and *series* 141–2, *see also* play, playfulness  
  
 magnificence and minifcidence *see*  
 abbreviation and expansion  
 marble 136–7, 148, 151, 179, 184,  
 187–8, 189, 192, 194–5, Pls 6, 10;  
 faux 191, Pls 7, 11  
 Marius Victorinus 32n30, 94, 115–17, 139  
 Martianus Capella 140n13  
 McGuire, Brian Patrick 68n35, 123n32  
 medical theory: and rhetoric 29–30, 81–9;  
 of the humours 31, 110–11; *see also*  
 physiology  
 mixture 46–8, 151–64, 169; and purity  
 48, 169; in medical theory 31–2;  
*see also* diversity  
 Murphy, James J. 88, 118  
 music/musicians 8, 17–18, 31 with n29,  
 32, 33, 50, 73, 95–6, 140–1, 159–61,  
 169, 172, 185, 188–9, 201–2; human  
 body compared to musical  
 instrument 32–3  
*Musica enchiriadis* 160  
  
 Nemo, St (play on the name) 23–4  
 Notker Balbulus of St Gall 90, 101  
  
 Ofili, Chris 1–3  
 Origen 96n37, 97, 162–3  
 Ormesby Psalter 155, 174, Pl. 8  
  
*Pange lingua gloriosi* (hymn) 38n42,  
 106–7  
 paradox *see* antithesis  
 Paul the Silentiary *see* Hagia Sophia  
 perspective 128; polyfocal 151–5, 161,  
 169–70, 173–5, 187  
 Peter of Celle 3–7, 139–40, 153–5  
 Peter the Chanter 145  
 Physiology, of laughter and tears 29–31,  
 140–6, 170; of taste 91, 110–11  
 play, playfulness chap.1 passim, 60n23,  
 63–4, 70–9, 101–2, 141–2, 182n23,  
 201–2; *see also ludus* and *series*  
 Pliny, story of Zeuxis 43–4  
 Procopius *see* Hagia Sophia  
 puzzles 102, 170, 172, 180, 187, 192,  
*see also* games  
  
 Quintilian 9, 84, 87, 102, 103, 109, 118,  
 119, 120–1, 149n34, 156–7  
  
 Rankin, Susan 160n59  
 reading, experience of 5–8, 19, 85, 130–1,  
 139–40, 153–6, 175, 202  
 Recht, Roland 46n3, 191n45  
*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 25 (with Pl. 2),  
 87, 118–19, 124n36, 137–9,  
 157, 162  
 Rosenfeld, Jessica 10, 21n8, 78n50  
 Rosenwein, Barbara H. 45n1  
 rumination 8n9, 30, 111, 127–31  
  
 Scarry, Elaine 193n48  
 Seneca 60–1  
 senses, five 5, 34, 36–7, 46–8, 71, 73–6,  
 90–1, 95–6, 167, 184, 198–9; and  
 pleasure, Augustine on 57–9; ‘spiritual  
 senses’ 126–8; *see also* T/taste  
 Song of Songs 11, 97, 198; Augustine  
 on 62–3, 156; Bernard of Clairvaux’s  
 sermons on 67–70, 90–2  
 Sorabji, Richard 31n30, 56, 59n20  
 styles, classical modes of 86–7, 174–5  
 sublimity *see* abbreviation and expansion  
 Suger, Abbot, on the renovations of St  
 Denis 39–41  
 Swift, Helen 78n50, 179  
  
 T/taste 75–6, 85, 90–1, 94–7, 103–4,  
 chap.4 passim, 149, 153  
 Taylor-Briggs, Ruth 115n17  
 tears *see* under physiology  
 Tertullian 55–6, 164  
 Theodulph, Bishop of Orléans 99–101  
 Theophilus (monk) 152–3, 193  
 Thomas of Cîteaux 198–9  
 tragedy, and humours 30–1; in Bernard  
 of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs* sermon 26  
 68–9  
 transubstantiation 131–2  
*trompe l’oeil* 189–91, 195, 203  
  
 ugliness, concept of 175–81  
 Uguccone da Pisa *see* Isidore of Seville  
  
 Virgil 20, 141, 182  
  
 Walter of St. Victor 133  
 Walter, Katie L. 145n24  
 will, Augustinian theory of 51–2, 119;  
*see also* intention(s)

William of Auxerre 126–7

Wimsatt, William 9

Wind, Edgar 21

Yeats, W.B. 1, 7, 204

Zeuxis, story of *see* Pliny

Ziegler, Joseph 94, 96, 97n41, 98

with n44

Ziolkowski, Jan M. 10n14, 38n43,

104n55

# *Index of Words*

## English

honeste 113–14  
 huge 177n11  
 lap 177, *see also* French laide  
 plesaunte 177  
 seriousli 20  
 swete 104, 177  
 syllic 36  
 ugly 176–8  
 unwlitig 177n11

## French

beauté 177, 179, 180; belle 179–80  
 entendre 85; entendement 189  
 laide 177, 179–80, *see also* English lap  
 saveur/savoir 180; *see also* Latin: sapio  
     and sapor  
 sens 81–2, 136  
 soutil 189

## Greek

acedia 144, 146  
 agathos 96  
 agon 22  
 aisthēsis 47  
 boulómai 42  
 charis 21, 80, 109; acharis 86,  
     *see also* Latin dulcis  
 chrestos/chrestoteta 96–8  
 chroia(s) 137, 181  
 chrōma 181, 186  
 deinotes 86  
 dikaios/dikaion 57n18  
 doxa 42  
 dysmorphos 177n11  
 (h)edu- (root) 81  
 energie 84n9  
 eucrasia 82, 104, 142  
 eutrapelia 78  
 glukus 81, 96  
 hadron 87, 188n39  
 ischnos -non 86, 87, 188n39  
 kakozeōs, xērokakozēōs 86  
 kalos 96, 135n2, 166–7  
 krinein 42  
 megaloprepon 86  
 meletein 57  
 meletema 127n41  
 metabolē 135

mimesis 14  
 morphē 183  
 nous 165  
 phōnē 46  
 phronesis 57, 95, 133n55  
 pistis 102; pithein 42  
 pneuma 31, 144  
 poiesis 25, 157; poiein 188  
 poikil- (root) 135, 137  
 polychroia 181  
 prepon 79, 115, 118, 167–8, 186  
 psuche (psysche) 31, 86, 165  
 sophia (sophos) 95, 133n55  
 symphonia/sumphōnía 46, 47  
 techne 13, 18

## Hebrew

methq (Hebrew root) 96  
 tob 96–8

## Latin

acetosus 111n9  
 acutus 45, 111n9  
 admiratio 148;  
 admirabilis (causa) 118  
 adorno 113–14  
 aestimatio 42  
 affectus 45  
 agere 9  
 altus 45  
 amarus 45, 90, 111n9, 112; amaritudo  
     104n55  
 amplificatio 173  
 anceps (causa) 118–19  
 animus 31, 70–71; animales 70–72  
 apertus 62n27, 117, 119  
 aridus 87, 91  
 ars ludorum 78, 201  
 artifex 17, 203n64, 205  
 asper 45, 184  
 bellitudo 166  
 benevolentia 54, 123, 139  
 bonus -a, -um 9, 97–8, 103, 196;  
     bonitas 94, 96n38, 97, 167  
 brevitās 172–3  
 calor/caloris 110, 186  
 candidus 178, 185, 190n42  
 cantus 141, 201–2  
 carnifex 4

Latin (*cont.*)

- carnis edomatio 6–7  
 causa/ae 115, 118–22  
 charissima 198  
 clarus 45, 120  
 colo -ere 66, 186, 188; cultus 66, 188  
 color/ colores 61, 82n3, 181, 186, 188  
 commoditas 116  
 compositus 117; compositio 120, 176n10  
 consilium 19n4, 79  
 corporeales 70  
 credere 102  
 curiositas 149–50  
 decens 117; decentus 204;  
 decet (decere) 114, 117n22, 121, 138, 167, 184  
 decor 114, 184, 185, 192;  
 decora 97n40, 198; decorare, decoro 113–14;  
 decorum (decet) 79, 114–15, 121, 134, 167–8, 186  
 decus 113, 198  
 deformis 177  
 delectio 70;  
 delectatio -nes 58n19, 71–2, 74, 77n48;  
 delectare 201  
 descriptio 14, 140n14  
 dignus -a, -um 138; dignius 120–1;  
 dignitas 137–8, 152, 153n41, 156–9, 162, 164  
 dilectus 90, 97n40  
 diminutio 173  
 dispositio 167, 185, 203–4;  
 disponere 204  
 disputatio 22, 28n23  
 diversitas 151, 156, 158–9  
 dubita (causa) 118  
 ductus 13, 53–4, 61, 79, 137–8, 150, 168, 169, 171–2, 175  
 dulcis -e 55, 56, 61, 77n48, 79, 80, 81–2, 90, 91, 94, 96, 97, 101–2, 103, 106, 107–9, 111n9, 121, 123, 125, 130, 134, 136, 198, 201, 205;  
 dulcedo 55, 89, 92, 94–6, 102, 104n55, 108, 112, 122, 123, 125, 127, 158n55, 166; dulcescant 63; dulce carmen 92, 100n46, 101n47, 103; dulcedo Dei 89, 94n30, 95n35, 96, 125; *see also* suavis; Greek glukis  
 elegans 45, 124n37; elegantia 123–5  
 eloquentia 102–3, 124  
 ethos 9, 168  
 evidentia 84, 127  
 exprimere 50  
 fastidium 111, 139, 146, 148, 149  
 fides 14, 38, 42, 85, 102, 119, 123  
 fig-: figmentis 201; figura 140n14;  
 figurata 63, 102  
 flor- 66; floridus 87; floreat 65  
 foedus 45, 177, 183–4  
 foetidus 183  
 forma 183; formosa 67–9;  
 formosus 183  
 frigidus 85  
 fruor 128n43  
 gaudens 21  
 gelos 143  
 gena 145  
 genialis 30, 142  
 genua 145  
 gestus 38n41, 163n65, 169  
 gravitas 137–8, 152, 166  
 gustus 91n24, 95n32, 108–9, 110n5, 125, 127, 129–30, 133n55;  
 gustare 90, 126, 128; gustus spiritualis 127; gustus urbis 109  
 habitus 59n21, 60–1  
 hilaritas 30, 144, 148  
 hispidus 84n7  
 honestus -a -um: 20, 32n30, 39, 55, 63, 72, 79n53, 80, 112–18, 120–3, 125, 128, 129, 134, 205; honestas 55–6, 116, 120, 123; honesto -are 80, 113–14; honestus -a -um: honesta (causa) 115, 120–2  
 humilis -e 120, 153; humilitas 69n37, 70; humilis (causa) 118  
 imago 140n14  
 incalescere 85  
 incantio 27  
 informus 183  
 insipidus 91  
 intentio 43, 48, 51–3, 61, 70, 167–8, 170–2  
 intentio auctoris 53, 167  
 iocus -a -um 141; iocundus -a -um 90, 120; iucunditas 123–5  
 iter 13, 54, 61  
 iudicium 43; iustitia 57, 58n19, 126n40  
 lectio 19, 131n49, 153n42; lectio divina 5, 128, 130, 139, 153, 154  
 licit- 57, 58, 126; licentia 59; illicit- 57–9  
 logos 17, 23n11, 46–7, 129n45, 168, 198  
 ludus 20–1, 27, 76, 77n48, 141n16, 142, 170, 172  
 meditatio 19n4, 20, 39, 96, 127n41, 131n49

- mixtura 151, 161–2, 164  
 nemo 23–4, 55  
 niger -ra -rum 50, 67–9, 185  
 obscura (causa) 118–19  
 ornatus -a -um 102, 117, 120,  
 121, 138n7; ornamentum 185;  
 orno 113–14  
 os, oris 6n7, 182n21, 194n50  
 otium 76, 130  
 passio 45n1, 111  
 pellis 68n34, 69, 182  
 persuadere -eo 121; *see also*  
 suadeo/persuadeo  
 phantasia 43, 52  
 phantasm 43, 50, 70–1, 142, 147  
 pictura 140  
 pinguis 45  
 proportio 46, 47  
 propria 124n35  
 pulc(h)er -ra -rum 45, 68n34, 69,  
 97n40, 100, 120, 121, 169, 176n10,  
 181–4, 196, 198; pulchritudo  
 102, 162, 166–7, 181, 182, 186,  
 197, 199  
 risus 30, 141n15, 143  
 rota combinatoria 26  
 ruminatio 127  
 rusticitas 109n2, *see also* urbanitas  
 sacer -ra -rum (sacramentum, sacrificio,  
 sanctum) 89  
 sal 30, 91, 142; salsus 111n9  
 salus/saluus 30; salubriter 102n52, 103  
 sanguis 3n2, 82, 89, 183; sanguisuga 89  
 sanis 89  
 sapio -ere: 85, 91, 94, 95n32, 108;  
 sapiens 94, 95, 115, 125; sapidus -a -  
 um 95, 130, 132–4, 189; sapientia 57,  
 77n48, 79n53, 94–6, 98, 115, 125,  
 129–30, 132–4, 158n52, 180,  
 202n63, 205; sapida scientia 95,  
 132–3  
 sapor(es) 95, 99, 108, 110, 111, 125, 129  
 sardismos (soraismos) 156, 157n49  
 satietas 138–9, 146, 148, 149  
 scientia *see* sapida scientia *under*  
 sapio -ere  
 sedentes 89  
 sensus 12, 47, 73n42, 82, 126n40,  
 196n54, 202nn62 and 63; sensus  
 communis 47  
 sepulchrum 184  
 seria 20, 141–2, 154, 170, 172  
 series 20  
 sodalis 89  
 speciosus -a -um 120, 179n13,  
 183, 184; species 183, 194–5  
 spissus 188n39  
 splendor 166, 198  
 spolia 151  
 suadeo/persuadeo: 81, 89, 102; sueo  
 88–9; suadabilis 95; suasoria 102;  
 suaviloquens 80  
 suavis -e 45, 56, 61, 80–2, 89, 92, 94,  
 96–8, 101–3, 105–6, 108–9, 121,  
 125, 127n40, 136, 183; suavitas 55,  
 89, 92, 94–6, 98, 102, 108, 123, 137,  
 152, 161, 197  
 sublimitas 69n37, 70, 166  
 subtilis 45, 87, 180n17, 188–9  
 sumptuositas 148, 149  
 taedium 146, 154n44, 155, 183n23  
 tangere 126, 128  
 tenor 54  
 texo 188  
 theatrica 200n59, 201  
 torpeo 183  
 tragica / tragoedias 142  
 transferendo 39n45, 40  
 translatio 96, 103  
 tristitia 31, 69, 74, 144  
 tumidus 87  
 turpis -e 118, 183; turpitude 72  
 urbanitas 30, 65, 109, 123–5  
 utilis -e: 32n30, 63, 71–2, 79, 115,  
 116–17, 121, 125, 128n43, 134, 192,  
 201, 205; utilitas 116; utor 128n43  
 vanitas 72  
 variatio 135n2, 197  
 varieg- (Lat. Root) 136n3  
 varietas 31n30, Chapter 5 *passim*  
 varius (and its derivatives?) 45, 135n2  
 venustus 10, 37, 57, 150, 166, 167,  
 182–3, 184–5, 194  
 veritas 123n34, 124  
 videor 39, 40  
 videre 39, 79n53, 80, 115, 126, 128  
 voluntas (-are) 42, 50–1, 58–9 with  
 n20, 70, 84n6, 119, 123  
 vox 38n41, 47n5, 97, 141n15, 164n65,  
 169; voces dulces/suavis 103  
 vultus 38n41, 163nn64 and 65, 168,  
 169, 195n53



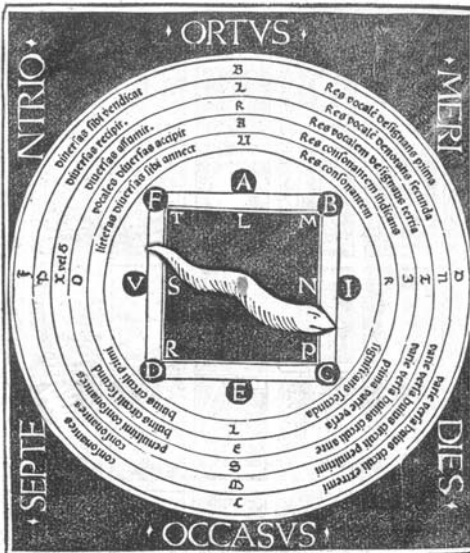
1 The beginning of Cicero, *De inventione*: rhetoric as Invention and deliberation, 'finding arguments on all sides'. British Library MS Burney 275, fo. 120<sup>r</sup> (detail). French (Paris), probably made for the Chancellor of the University of Paris, Franciscus Caracciolo, between 1309 and 1316. (Photo © The British Library Board.)



2 The beginning of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: rhetoric as analytical disputation; the 'tree' diagrams the main topics of rhetoric according to this treatise. In this picture, the figure of Lady Rhetoric is dressed differently from fo. 120<sup>r</sup>. British Library MS Burney 275, fo. 143<sup>r</sup> (detail). (Photo © The British Library Board.)



3 The beginning of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, in the Latin translation of Boethius. Lady Dialectic-Rhetoric, at the left, dressed as she appears in fo. 143<sup>r</sup>, hands her pupil over for instruction in more advanced logic by a university master. British Library MS Burney 275, fo. 184<sup>r</sup> (detail). (Photo © The British Library Board.)



4 Jacobus Publicius, 'A sphere for combining real letters', from *Ars memoriae* (Venice: Ratdolt, 1482). The volvelle in the middle actually turns; the concentric spheres are imagined as rotating independently as well. (Photo © The Huntington, San Marino, CA. Reproduced with permission.)



5 The Rupertus Cross; gilt-bronze over wood, with polychrome glass inserts (most now missing); Anglo-Saxon, second half of 8th century. The metal is decorated with vine scrolls inhabited by birds and animals. The cross stands just over 5 feet tall and 3 feet wide. It was made by Anglo-Saxon craftsmen, perhaps for the cathedral dedication and canonization of St Rupert during the term of Virgil, bishop of Salzburg (747–84), an Irishman trained in Iona. Bischofshofen, Salzburg Diocesan Museum. (Photo: York Digital Library © Jane Hawkes.)



6 Marble panel in the entrance porch, Hagia Sophia. The colour of the dark striations is a deep, now faded, red. (Photo © Mary Carruthers.)



7 Plaster painted as a faux marble panel, on the north wall of the tribune, Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe. Unrestored medieval paint (perhaps 12th century). A section of masonry under the plaster can be seen in the lower right. (Photo © Mary Carruthers.)



8 'The eye does not know where to gaze first.' Can you find the beginning of Ps. 52, 'Dixit insipiens'? The Ormesby Psalter. English (East Anglian), c.1320. Bodleian Library MS Douce 366, fo. 72r. (Photo © The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.)



9 'Glorieuse Acheissance', from *Les douze dames de rhétorique*. French, c.1463. Cambridge University Library MS Nn 3.2, fo. 37<sup>v</sup>. (Photo © Cambridge University Library.)



10 Marble columns, and marble arch and triforium decoration in the nave, San Miniato al Monte, Florence (c.1100). Note especially the regularity of the marble panelling inside the arch. (Photo © Mary Carruthers.)



11 Columns painted (over plaster) as marbles, and arches painted as regular masonry courses, in the nave, Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe. Medieval paint (12th century), restored several times. (Photo © Mary Carruthers.)